INDENTURED LABOUR IN FIJI

AN INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY

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PREFACE TO FIRST ISSUE

THIS Report has been published immediately on our return from Fiji. It attempts to show, on the one hand, the serious nature of the evils which exist under the indenture system. On the other hand, it endeavours to explain what painstaking efforts are now being made by the Fiji Government to deal justly by the Indian settlers.

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REPORT ON INDENTURED LABOUR IN FIJI

[*N.B.*—In the following pages a few facts are recorded which were witnessed by one of us, not both; but, for convenience in writing a joint report, we have ventured to use the pronoun "we" throughout.]

WHEN we speak in our present Report of the "Indenture System" we have specially in mind certain features, which have been common to this form of Indian labour, ever since it was started in Natal more than half a century ago. These have given to it the name and character it bears. They may be summed up as follows :

Recruiting of individuals in India, at the rate of forty women for every hundred men.

A five years' term of compulsory, State-regulated labour. The absence of freedom to choose or to change either employment or employer.

A minimum fixed rate of wages, which tends to remain stationary, even when the price of food rises.

The payment of immigration charges by the employer.

In Fiji we were often asked whether we had a rooted objection to "indenture" in any form or shape. We were informed that a large number of Englishmen, all over the world, had gone out under "indenture" to the Colonies. These Englishmen had no objection to "indenture". Why should the Indian object to it ?

When the matter was brought up in this form our answer was that the whole question turned on the freedom, responsibility and intelligence of those who entered into the agreement.

In the case of the European immigrant, there was a natural presumption that he understood the exact terms of the agreement before starting, and that he felt quite clear in his own mind that they were neither oppressive nor degrading. Indeed, so far were his interests safeguarded by those in authority, that in South Africa, we found, the contract itself was not valid until it had been renewed after an interval had been allowed to the immigrant to examine on the spot all the conditions. Only when he was perfectly satisfied, after seeing things with his own eyes, was the contract finally signed. We were told in Australia that no one is allowed to come out to the Southern States under contract except with the permission of Government. In Queensland, where European labour is badly needed, the limit that is allowed for an agricultural contract is a single year.

These facts show clearly with what care and precaution the interests of the European immigrant are safeguarded and assured. Furthermore—and this is the chief point of all—the contract is a purely civil one. If the European finds that the terms of the contract are not being faithfully kept, he has an immediate remedy at hand in a court of law. He knows the method by which he can get his agreement cancelled ; and if he can prove that there has been any unfair advantage taken of his ignorance, he can be quite certain of a patient and sympathetic hearing from the Magistrate, who is usually a fellow countryman of his own.

The position may be briefly stated as follows : Contracts for personal service, which are made, with ignorance on the one hand and intelligence on the other : or contracts which are brought about by the exploitation of the weak : or contracts which are engaged in for an excessively long period of years—these all tend to reproduce servile features. In these cases the new word "indenture" is nearly equivalent to the old word "slavery" writ large. Indeed, the wish to possess such a form of labour proceeds from the same instinct—the instinct to endeavour to get the service of a fellow human being on compulsory terms.

This then is the root objection to the present Indian "indenture". It is neither a free, nor an intelligent contract. It is not what a business man would call a "square deal". It is also fixed for a dangerously long period of years, and thus is liable to lead to the abuse of individual liberty.

Other evils, peculiar to the condition of Indian recruitment, and to the character of the coolie "lines" in Fiji, will come up later, in this report, for examination. But the objection which has here been urged is valid against any form of indentured labour, where the contract is made for too long a period, and is engaged in under unequal conditions.

It will be best to deal first with the length of contract. It has been already pointed out how strictly limited, in the case of Europeans, the period of contract is, and with what safeguards it is endorsed. With regard to labour other than European we found on enquiry in Johannesburg that the Kaffir contracts on the Rand were usually for one and a half years. The Chinese contract, when in operation, had been for five years, but for political as well as industrial and moral causes, that form of labour had been abandoned. We would add that we did not find in S. Africa a single good word said for the Chinese indenture system. Its morals were regarded as unspeakably corrupt.

In Natal we found that the Indian indenture system with its low percentage of women and its five years' contract was still in force. We saw with our own eyes its inherent evils and there were very few indeed in the Colony, outside a small group of planters, who were ready to uphold it. Since that time it has been practically abandoned.

In the Malay States, indentured labour was first tried on the five years basis, but this has now been brought to an end by a joint agreement of the Government and the planters, and a much freer and shorter form of contract has been substituted for it.

We were informed by one who had full knowledge of the labour conditions in New Guinea, that in the Papuan plantations a yearly engagement had become the rule of the employers; and this produced more satisfactory results than a contract for a longer period.

In Hawaii, which is most near in its conditions of life to Fiji, the Americans, as far as we could gather, have never taken to indentured labour. They secure permanent employees by high wages and advantageous terms.

In Ceylon, the indenture system has never been in operation. Labour, in large quantities, is engaged on a monthly contract. An altogether different evil, namely coolie indebtedness, has to be combated with, but the five years' indenture has never been tried, nor would it be acceptable to the planters.

It will thus be seen that, in the case of immigrant labour, a contract is not uncommon. But, wherever the period of contract has been prolonged, it has led to a serious curtailment of individual liberty and to bad moral results. On the other hand, a short contract has not been open to industrial objection, while at the same time it has tended to preserve freedom.

Indeed, this special form of short contract labour (in return for passage paid) is likely to become more and more common in future, now that ocean travel has been made easier and quicker and cheaper. The flow of labour, under contract, across the ocean is only another form of the migration of labour from a congested area of population to an uncongested area, or from the villages for town factory work. One of the most interesting recent developments of such migratory labour has been the yearly transport of Italians to Argentina for harvesting purposes. Such a migration would have seemed impossible only a short time ago.

There was scarcely any subject which the Fiji planters were more eager to discuss with us than the continuance of the present term of five-yearly indenture. We listened carefully to all they had to say from a business point of view. On the other side, we stated our own invincible objection to such a long and dangerous service. Our opinion on that point had been fixed, once for all, long ago by what we had witnessed in Natal. We were understood, from the very first, both by the Government and by the planters to be immovable on that issue.

Three grounds were put forward by the planters in favour of a longer rather than a shorter contract in the case of Fiji. We felt that each of them had weight, but we felt also that the planters' difficulties should be met in some other way than by the retention of a five years' indenture.

First, they argued that the cost of the passage out to Fiji was very great. If, in the future, they were obliged to bring out whole families rather than individuals, the cost would be

greater still for every unit of labour. A family could hardly cost less, in passage money, than 450 rupees. If the contract were a short one, this heavy expense would have to be incurred again and again at very short intervals.

Secondly, the planters urged that sugar-planting itself was skilled work. During the first six months, therefore, the labour done by the new worker was of very little value. Only after a full year, they said, could the workman be called efficient. So then, if the contract were too short, the labourer would be taken away, just as he was getting into his work.

Thirdly, they insisted with great reiteration that the work itself was an apprenticeship. Only those who had thoroughly learnt modern methods of sugar-cane cultivation, by working under a big employer, could hope themselves in the future to undertake profitable plantation work on their own account. They pointed out that Fiji was not like India in this respect, but rather like Java. The best Indian growers of cane, they said, in Fiji had learned their business during the five years of indenture. If they had had a shorter training they might never have learnt at all.

Such were the points which were brought to our notice with regard to the length of contract. We remained convinced in our opinion that a shorter period of training on much freer and more equitable terms would bring about as good, if not better, technical results; while at the same time the moral and social value of the greater freedom would be, even from the business point of view, very high indeed.

We would next endeavour to make plain, by illustrations from our own personal experience, how very widely the present system of Indian indentured labour differs from the free, equal and intelligent contract entered into by Europeans.

We shall best accomplish this purpose by offering examples, which are chosen as typical out of hundreds of interviews with Indians in Fiji. They expressed to us, with the utmost freedom, the circumstances in which they were first led to come out to Fiji and their experiences on the plantations.

It will be seen from these what an amount of fraud and deception appears to be at work in the process of recruiting. It will be seen, also, how unscrupulous exploitation dogs the

footsteps of the illiterate coolie from first to last. On every side his path is beset with pitfalls and very few indeed escape disaster during their long five years' indenture.

In giving these examples, which came under our personal observation and were entered down in our notes on the spot, we have purposely omitted the coolies' names. In very many cases their information was given in confidence, with a request that their names should not be revealed. The peculiar state of fear that exists among Indians throughout the Islands will be explained later on. It was a common experience with both of us to have the question asked : "Are you the coolie agent sahib?" Only when that question was satisfactorily settled would conversation flow freely. Later on during our visit, when the report had spread among the coolies about our coming, we were known as the "Calcutta-wale Sahibs" and people would come from long distances to tell us their own story.

From all that we were able to gather from the indentured coolies' own lips, and also from the free Indians, it is probably not an exaggeration to state that, in the case of 80 per cent of those who were indentured in India, some deceit was practised by the recruiting agent. This man is actually paid so much per head for his task by the Colonial Emigration authorities at 61 Garden Reach, Calcutta, or elsewhere. He is given an extra bonus for every woman. The price paid in the west of the United Provinces seems to be as high as forty-five rupees for every man and fifty-five rupees for every woman; in the East of the United Provinces and in Madras we were told the fee was lower. But whatever the price may be is immaterial; such payments made, at so much per head, for men and women, recall the worst features of the old slave system, and are quite indefensible. They offer a premium to a very low class of agent to engage in acts of cunning and fraud.

We have been ourselves into the recruiting areas of India and have questioned the villagers about the activities of these agents of the Colonial Emigration Depots. Allowing for every exaggeration on the part of those who are illiterate there can be no shadow of doubt that the frauds already practised by recruiting agents have been immense. We found out another evil, which makes this unscrupulous recruiting more dangerous still. The recruiting agents represent themselves as subordinate

Government officials and bring the name of Government in to set forward their own plans. The villagers are often too simple to discover this obvious fraud. Those of us who know the dread, in the ordinary villager's mind, of the power of the subordinate official, will not need to be told what an instrument of tyranny such a false representation may become. It will also be understood what a prejudice against the Indian Government itself is likely to be raised. But the evil goes still deeper. A missionary of long experience in the villages, whose word could be thoroughly trusted in such a matter, told us that there was frequent collusion between the recruiting agents and the police, the latter receiving from the former a commission.

The recruiting agent, becoming a man of power, carries the exercise of his authority far beyond the limits of recruiting. He becomes not seldom a blackmailer whom the villagers actually bribe in order to live in peace.

A typical case of this came under our own observation. A villager, named Fakhira, had his wife and daughter decoyed from him by a recruiting agent, who offered to return them to him on the payment of a sum of a money. Fakhira had not the sum ready to hand and could not borrow it. The wife and daughter were missing. He never saw them again.

We had a long conversation with a coolie, who had escaped, after being fradulently recruited. He had been given *datura*. In this case, his mother had almost lost her reason during his absence. The small village to which he belonged was in a state of panic-fear. It is now a clearly indicated fact that, over large areas of the United Provinces, there has been added to the other fears of the villager this new dread of the recruiting agent. The villagers have in some districts actually banded themselves together against their common enemy, and there have been cases of violent assaults upon the recruiting agent when he has been found entering a village. Songs in the vernacular are now sung from village to village warning people against the recruiter. The situation is not altogether unlike the Mormon scare in England, and the object of the villagers is the same, namely, the protection of the chastity of their women and the sanctity of their married life.

It was deeply instructive to find that the actual accounts of the coolies in Fiji as to the manner of their own recruitment

tallied exactly with the stories we heard from the villages in the Indian recruiting districts. We listened, as it were, to the same story from both ends—from the fellow villagers and relations of the recruited coolies in India and from the recruited coolies themselves in Fiji.

Piecing together the different stories and eliminating exaggerations, it is clear that the recruiting agent in recent years has begun to fight shy of going direct to the villages and inducing people to come to the depot from their own village homes. He does not bargain with them there. Nearly every coolie we questioned in Fiji said he was away from home when he was recruited. In a very large number of cases the coolie's own home people knew nothing about his recruitment. Very possibly many such coolies were escaping from justice, or running away from some family quarrel at the time. But others were clearly quite simple village people, involved in no such trouble. They had lost, perhaps, their relations in a crowded railway station. They were on a pilgrimage and did not know the way. They were merely going from one village to another, when the recruiting agent came along and tempted them with his story.

It was noticeable among the women how many were recruited at the pilgrim centres. The common narrative was, that the recruiting agent came up, offering to take the woman to her relations, or to show her some sacred shrine, and then took her to the depot instead. The evidence given of such practices was far too circumstantial in detail, and far too frequently given with fresh detail and fresh names of places, to allow of any doubt concerning its substantial accuracy.

The following is an account of a visit paid to Muttra to gather information at first hand about up-country coolie recruiting.

We found, at the first depot, that all the coolies had been moved off to Calcutta. At the second depot, a Muhammadan (who appeared to us a dangerous person to be entrusted with the charge of Indian women) was manager of the place. The first coolie, whom we saw, was evidently a prostitute. Four men were also there, who told us they were ready to emigrate. One man, of very low caste, was even eager to go. He told us he had been getting only two annas a day in India. He had no

idea where Fiji was, and said he thought it was about two hundred *kos* from Muttra. The last coolie was a woman, who was going out again to Fiji. She told us that a man had lived with her in Fiji, but had deserted her as soon as she landed in India. Now she was all alone. No one had anything to do with her. She said that in Fiji there was plenty of money, but in India she could make no money at all. She was in a very wretched condition. Evidently she expected some other man to live with her, if she went out.

In the third depot, news of our coming had preceded us and feverish efforts had been made to get things straight. There were only two coolies. One did not appear at first, and when he came forward, he would hardly answer any question. We told the manager to leave us alone. Then the coolie began crying and said he was in great trouble. He had been in the depot for four days and had not been allowed to go out at all. He did not wish to go away to Fiji. (When I had asked him previously before the manager, he had said he was willing.) He implored us to take him away. We called the manager back and told him this. He went up to the man and began to threaten him. The coolie at once got frightened. We told the manager to speak quietly, and the man then said that he wished to go away. The manager told him to fetch his bundle and go.

We then went to see a Gaur Brahman who had gone mad on account of his wife being taken away by the recruiting agent. The whole neighbourhood collected, showing their sympathy and pity. The madman was a pathetic sight to witness.

The news had by this time spread widely that we were in the town, and the relatives of those who had been taken away flocked round us. A respectable Jat came up to us. His brother was blind and had an only son, who was taken by the recruiters. The lad was sixteen years of age. Another boy had been taken with him, but had been rejected on medical grounds. This second boy told the blind father his son's fate. The Jat informed us that he had gone to the Magistrate and asked for an order to stop the boy's embarkation. The Magistrate asked for a deposit of thirty rupees, which was paid, and a telegram was sent to Calcutta. An answer had

come from the depot that as the boy was going by his own consent, his embarkation could not be delayed. The Jat thereupon asked the Magistrate for an order to enter the Calcutta depot. He went to Calcutta, and, as he described to us his treatment, we could understand the difficulties which were placed in his way. In the end he was informed that the boy had already sailed for Fiji. If he wished to get him back, a deposit must be made of 465 rupees.

A Hindu, by caste a Bania, spoke to us concerning his wife. She had been taken by the recruiters, and he was very bitter against them. We asked him if he had made any attempt to get her back. He said he had not, for when once she had been inside the depot she was stained.

Some correspondence was given us concerning a coolie who had been shipped to British Guiana. The following official letter is of interest:

SIR,........With reference to your endorsement, No. 20-47 of the 4th instant, I have the honour to inform you that a sum of Rs. 531, will be required for the repatriation, etc., of Radha Kishan No. 104, Mutlah 1912. (Details given.) It will not be possible for Radha Kishan to return to India till about August or September 1916.

The father of Radha Kishan was a villager earning four annas a day. He told us he was going to try to borrow the money, because his son had written to him in very great distress.

It was clear from the narratives of the women in Fiji that when once they had crossed the threshold of the depot their terror became too great to allow them to turn back. The recruiting agent seemed able to stupefy them with fear. He was then able to coach them in the questions which they had to answer and they very rarely refused to reply according to his directions when the time came.

With the men folk, the methods of the recruiting agents appear to be somewhat different. Here it is the ordinary villager's cupidity which is the lever most frequently used. If he is of the stupid, ignorant type, then Fiji is referred to as a district near to Calcutta where high wages are to be obtained. Incredible though it may appear, we came across many cases where the indentured coolies informed us, with every appearance of truth,

that they were quite unaware of their real destination, until they found themselves tossing and sea-sick in the Bay of Bengal.

If the villager, on the other hand, is of the more intelligent type, then the full details of the indenture are revealed. But the work is made out to be very light indeed, and the most glowing prospects are given. Nothing is said about the penal laws, or the hard conditions of compulsory labour. If the Fiji conditions were even normally fair and prosperous and wholesome, then little harm might be done by mere exaggerations. The advertisements which attract emigrants from England are often highly coloured. Yet on the whole the English emigrants are satisfied. But in Fiji the amount of satisfaction we found was very limited indeed. Here and there we discovered a set of coolies who were happy on the estates. But this was the exception, not the rule.

The recruiting agent appears not to be content with finding his recruits among the peasant class only. He deals with all sorts and conditions of men and women. Where he finds a Sikh or a Jat, who is ready to step into his toils, he pictures Fiji as an ideal place for a soldier or a policeman, if only the thumb mark is placed to the agreement. A whole group of Panjabis was once recruited in this way, under false pretences. When they found out, on arrival, how they had been cheated they broke out into open mutiny and held up a whole district, for the time being, with fire-arms (which they managed somehow to obtain) and the trouble was not stopped until Government separated them one from another and distributed them among different coolie "lines".

Sometimes the recruiting agent finds a raw youth fresh from school, with a smattering of English education, and a boyish desire for adventure. He pictures to him employment in Fiji, as a teacher, on fabulous rates of pay—if only the agreement is signed. We were startled every now and then to find in the coolie "lines" a young lad of high caste and education, whose whole appearance showed that he had no business at all in such a place. The condition of such lads, when they arrive and have to be lodged in the same quarter with men of low morals and unclean habits of life, is pitiable indeed.

There appears to us to be a clear need for an overhauling of the whole system of recruitment in India, and for a closing of

the up-country depots. We have spoken to many of the Emigration Officers and Magistrates, in whose courts the coolies' agreements are signed, and not one has expressed himself satisfied with what is going on. Each one has told us in turn that he had suspicions of some secret fraudulent dealing, which was very difficult indeed to detect. One who had the fullest opportunity of seeing the work of recruiting in up-country districts spoke of it, in our hearing, as "dirty work". Our own very limited experience corroborates that statement, and the narratives we heard in Fiji endorse it. If the indenture system is abolished, and free labour to the Colonies is allowed to go on, then it is most important that such labour shall only be recruited under free conditions.

We found, further, on examination, that the agreement which the coolie signs before going out, does not truly represent the facts of coolie life in Fiji. It is a misleading document. Not a word, for instance, is said concerning the penalties which await the coolie, if, for any reason (which he may regard as valid) he refuses to work. Another serious omission from the agreement (seeing that those who sign it are for the most part ignorant and illiterate people) is the failure to record the fact that food-rates in Fiji differ materially from those in India. The coolie is told in the agreement, that he will be paid at the minimum rate of twelve annas a day. But he is not told that the purchasing power of twelve annas in Fiji is scarcely equal to that of five annas in India. He is not told, also, that more is required in the way of clothing and other necessaries of life in Fiji than in India. So that the bare living expenses are nearly three times as high in Fiji as in India itself. One of the examples which follows will show what hardship this low rate of wages involves.[1]

The Indian woman who comes out under indenture has a still more serious charge to make against the signed agreement. These women are simple, ignorant Indian villagers who have been used to field work. They are told in the agreement that they will have agricultural work to do in Fiji at the minimum

[1] It is interesting to note that the English coinage of Fiji is given an "Indian" value by the coolies. A two shilling piece is called a rupee. A one shilling piece is called eight annas. Sixpence is regularly called four annas. But this does not at all represent the true proportional value. For eight annas in India would go considerably further than a shilling in Fiji.

wage of nine annas per day for a completed task. They naturally picture to themselves a state of labour in the field such as they have been used to in India. But when they get to their work in Fiji, they find that all is changed. Those who have seen the Indian woman working in the fields in India with her little family playing near her, will realise the change when she is told to leave her family behind in the coolie "lines". The provision of regulation "fly-proof nurseries" is no compensation to her for the loss of the privilege of looking after her own children, and living her own natural life in her own natural way. She is not told, also, in the agreement that she will be compelled, under penal clauses to work incessantly, day in, day out, with no time to cook her own husband's meals or look after her own children. She is never told anything also of the condition of the coolie "lines" in which she will be compelled to live, without any privacy or even decency, for five years, with no possibility of change.

All this is hidden from the village woman who enters into the indenture agreement in India. In these circumstances, as well as others, it cannot be called a fair contract. For it is made on behalf of one party, the Fiji Government, who is fully aware of the actual state of affairs as they exist in Fiji, with another, the ignorant coolie woman, who is imagining entirely different conditions.

The facts which have hitherto been stated, for the most part in general terms, may be illustrated and made more clear to the reader in India by the following specific cases. They are a few out of a very large number of instances which have come under our special notice.

1. A respectable woman, who told us that she had been on a pilgrimage to Benares and had become confused in the strange crowd and separated from her relations. A man had seen her crying and had promised to bring her to her own people. He had taken her instead to the depot. When she had found out her true plight, she had been too frightened to resist. Asked why she had answered the Magistrate's questions, she said that she was too frightened to do anything else. Asked whether she was told that she was to go on board ship and settle across the sea, she said "No".

[Very many circumstantial narratives of this kind were told us. It was noticeable to us how very large a proportion of the women, whom we questioned, were recruited at the pilgrim centres.]

2. A well educated, delicate lad from a village near Delhi, who spoke English fluently. He had been promised clerk's work by the recruiting agent. He was told nothing about being obliged to live in the coolie "lines". When we met him he was very unhappy. He had saved a little money and wished to buy himself out, but was not allowed at the time to do so. His employer had been kind to him and put him on light work, but nothing could remove the depression he felt at being forced to live as a coolie in the coolie "lines".

3. A Kayastha, who was met at Allahabad by a man wearing a sacred thread. The man pretended to be a Brahman, and promised the Kayastha work as a teacher in a school at Puri. He was taken instead to the Calcutta depot. This man was now out of indenture, and he was doing all he could in Fiji to help those who were still in the coolie "lines". He gave us a great deal of help, and we found his information accurate on the whole. Though educated in his own vernacular and quite above the "coolie" class in average intelligence, he was very deaf and at times appeared almost stupid. He was thus one who could have been easily deceived in the first instance. He told us that he had actually found out his mistake, when in the depot, but he had been too fearful to run away. From all we saw of him, we were convinced that his own narrative was substantially true.

4. A low caste Hindu, who was brought out under indenture for "agricultural work" and was set to cut up meat in a butchery. When asked by us how he, a Hindu, could engage in such work, he replied that he could not help it, as he was ordered to do it. He seemed much ashamed of himself, and hung down his head while he answered our questions. His companions in the butchery were Musalmans.

5. A Kabir Panthi, now out of indenture, who had been originally obliged to do the same kind of work. He told us that he had continually refused and had been imprisoned. We looked up his record on the estate and found he had been given 692 days' imprisonment while under indenture. When he came to

see us, he had clearly lost his moral character, and his record in the Colony, since he had become a free Indian, was a bad one. He had even been charged with biting a man's nose in a sordid quarrel and had been found guilty. But, in spite of this, we found a simple and true side to his character. It was not altogether undermined. It is not unlikely that he became a moral wreck through being compelled to do a work which was against his instincts and his conscience.

[We found some Madrasis of low caste who actually preferred to do this kind of butcher's work. But it is quite clear that the Government of India never contemplated such an occupation as butchery under the head of "agriculture" in the agreement. We therefore gave our own personal opinion to the Fiji authorities, that Hindus, however low in caste, should not be set to do the work of slaughtering animals.]

6. A Brahman boy, aged about 15, who came out in 1915. He had been deceived by the recruiting agent as to the nature of the work which he would be required to do. He was told when in India that he would have garden work given him in Fiji. His hands were quite unhardened, and he was very miserable, and seemed to be quite a child still in every way. He begged very pitiably to be allowed to go home to India.

[We found many cases of mere boys being indentured in India and brought out to Fiji. In one case a child came to us, who was under indenture. He declared that he was only twelve when he was recruited. He had been out nearly a year, and from his appearance we should regard it as doubtful if he could have been more than fourteen when we saw him. It is surely open to question, whether a boy of such tender age can legally enter into a complicated agreement which binds him for five years and in most cases settles his whole future. When we looked at random into the books of the Immigration Department, we found the following recent cases:

51500. Akkaru—Ganges 1—1913—aged 15.
51954. Thalary Nagadu—Ganges 1—1913—aged 16.
56449. Kuda Baksh—Mutlah 1—1915—aged 17.
56296. Bacha—Mutlah 1—1915—aged 17.

It should be noted that some of these ages are probably given on the higher side. We found, for instance, a boy who

could hardly be more than 15 entered in Fiji as aged 17. When we had the Calcutta register examined, we found that he was entered there as 20 years of age. The Fiji official told us that he had seen how impossible the age of 20 was for a mere boy, and had put down the age of 17 in the Fiji register as nearer the mark.

7. An intelligent coolie, labouring in the mill, told us that he was obliged to work on twelve hour shifts, and on alternate weeks had to go on night work from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. without extra pay. There is no mention of night work in the agreement. We found out, still further, that a large amount of highly skilled labour was being performed by the indentured coolies at an absurdly low rate of pay. Among the coolies who had been thus engaged in looking after the machinery of the mills were some who had been discarded because of some accident. In one mill, three men came up to us who had each lost a limb and were crippled for life. Yet no compensation had been made to them for this lifelong injury. We only heard of one case in the whole Colony, where such compensation had been given by an employer for serious injury to a coolie; and in that case the compensation was extracted by Government pressure. Thus the mill-owners so used their labour under the cover of the indenture system, that they obtained skilled work from the more intelligent of the coolies at the rate of a quarter of the market value, and, when these coolies met with an accident in the performance of their duty, refused to pay any compensation whatever, except under pressure.

8. A Madrasi; came out in 1913 on Sutlej IV aged 18. Laughed as he narrated to us how he had been deceived by the recruiting agent. Described to us his appearance before the Magistrate in India and how he hurried through the performance of question and answer. His parents did not know anything about where he had gone, till he wrote from Fiji; because he thought he was only going to get employment a short way from home and then to return.

[A very large number of coolies told us that their relations knew nothing of their whereabouts. Some told us they had never sent any letter home out of shame. Others told us that there was great difficulty in getting letters written and posted. Many again informed us that they had never heard from home

though they had written again and again. This was not unlikely; because when we went into a central post office in the interior of the main island and mentioned a coolie's name (whose widow-mother had written to us on our arrival in Fiji asking for news of her son), we found that a letter from the mother, properly addressed, had been waiting for three months undelivered. The postal arrangements are very bad in the Colony outside Suva, the capital. There must be an incalculable amount of misery amongst the relatives left behind in India, owing to the bad postal arrangements in Fiji and to the evils of fraudulent recruiting in India itself.]

9. A respectable married man who came out with his wife and two children, finding the struggle for existence very hard in India and hoping to get on better in Fiji. But he found by experience that living was so expensive in the Colony, that it was even more difficult than in India to keep his family and himself supplied with proper food and clothing. When his wife was nursing her child (she was the only woman with children in the coolie "lines") they were nearly starving. The average cost of food alone for one person in Fiji is not less than 3 rupees per week, and at that time he was earning 4 rupees, 2 annas per week. This man was very anxious to return home to Fyzabad in the United Provinces, where he had been earning six annas a day. He told us that he could manage to keep his wife and children better there than in Fiji.

[Even in this war-time, with higher prices for every commodity in Fiji, there has been no substantive advance made in the coolies' wages. Some employers have done a little to help out the earnings of the indentured coolies by issuing tickets which can purchase rice and sharps at pre-war rates. We were told by one employer that purchase by means of such "tickets" saved the coolie six annas in every three rupees. But the "ticket" process is very cumbrous; and very few coolies took advantage of it. When we asked the general manager of the C.S.R. Co. why the company did not give the coolie an advance in actual wages, he replied that when wages once rise, they have a tendency to keep up and not come down again. The company, therefore, had devised the "ticket" system. It was obvious to us, from this, that as far as wages are concerned, the indenture system places the coolie completely at the mercy of his employers.]

10. Two young Telugus were interviewed by us in the coolie "lines". They came out in 1915. What attracted them was the promise of twelve annas a day. They were earning four annas a day in India. They told us that they were no better off in their cost of living in Fiji. In hours of work, their condition was far worse than in India. In Madras their day's work was always over by noon; in Fiji they had to go on up to five or six o'clock in order to complete their task. In Fiji they were very unhappy because no one in the coolie lines could speak their own language, and they often could not understand the manager's or the sardar's orders. They were very anxious to get back to India.

The hours of labour mentioned were borne out by what we saw elsewhere. Late one evening a boy came over to the house where we were stayiug, about 3 miles away from some coolie "lines," which we had visited about 5.30 p.m. that same afternoon. When we asked him next morning why we did not see him in the "lines" he said that he had been out in the field when we came, because he had not completed his task. We were away when he came to see us that evening, but the missionary with whom we were staying told us that he arrived in a very exhausted condition. It was one of those cases of boy labour which troubled us so much in Fiji. The planter was in every way a good man, but this case had escaped his notice. We asked for the boy to be put on three-quarter task with full pay and this was done.

11. A Madrasi of a very low caste and low features came to us for protection against a sardar who had locked him up (so he told us) and beaten and starved him. The inspector, to whom we brought the case, was inclined to disbelieve the coolie, because he had already obtained convictions against two sardars quite recently in the same coolie "lines" for doing the same thing. We suggested that a bad tradition having been once established in the coolie "lines", it should be difficult to get rid of it. At our express wish, therefore, the inspector took up the case; and it resulted in the man's story being found true. One sardar was convicted in the Magistrate's court, another sardar was acquitted on a technical point of law, but an appeal to the Supreme Court has been lodged by the inspector. The English overseer, through whose neglect the cruelties were allowed to go

on, has been dismissed, owing to the firm action of the Agent-General of Immigration. The case was a striking testimony to us of the genuine desire on the part of the Government authorities to obtain justice for the "coolie". At the same time it also revealed to us the extraordinary difficulty under which coolies labour whose mother-tongue is not Hindustani. It was, literally, a matter of hours before we could get from this coolie the plain facts of his story; and the feeling that he was not understood made him nervous and excited, and this gave us a false impression. The inspector was in the same difficulty as ourselves.

[The recent immigration of Madrasi coolies, who speak Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Canarese, has led to the greatest possible confusion. In a trial for murder before the Chief Justice, held while we were in Suva, the accused prisoner only knew Malayalam. The Court Inspector only knew Tamil and English. A third party, therefore, had to be called in who knew Malayalam. The Chief Justice was, in this way, twice removed by language barriers from the prisoner at the bar. Yet, in these faulty circumstances, he was obliged to try the Madrasi for his life, and actually to condemn him to death.]

12. A Hindustani girl of good caste and respectable Hindu parentage had been decoyed from her father's home by a neighbouring woman in her village. The pretext was that a telegram had been received from her husband, who was ill and wanted her to go to him at once. Her father, not being on good terms with her husband's father, had separated her from her husband. She went, therefore, with this woman without letting her father know. Too late she found out how she had been deceived. On board ship her honour was assailed and only with the greatest possible difficulty had she been able to retain it. Now her only hope is that her father and mother will think that she is dead, because she feels that she has brought disgrace to her family. Though she has been nearly two years in Fiji she has not yet recovered from her first despair. She is afraid even to let her parents know where she is, because of the sense of degradation at her present lot in life.

13. A Rajput came out on the distinct understanding that he would be able to join a regiment if he went to Fiji. He spoke under great excitement when we saw him, as he was

in prison and condemned to death. His words were not easy to follow at one point, but we gathered that when signing, a Sahib had assured him that this would be his lot. He said with great emphasis that a Sahib could not tell a lie. He and his brother had been soldiers in India in Rajputana. They were a military family. Then his brother inherited some land and left his regiment and became a Zamindar. He joined his brother for a time, but was hankering to get back to his old military life when the recruiting agent came and deceived him. When he arrived in Fiji, he was told that he would have to enter the coolie "lines" and serve with the sweepers—as he expressed it. In such compulsory degradation, as he thought it, his life went utterly to pieces. He told us that the insults he received in the coolie "lines" had been unbearable. "They pulled my moustache," he said, and suited the action to the word. His offence had been an act of murder in a quarrel with a Muhammadan over an abandoned woman. The woman had slapped the Rajput's face and he had stabbed her. In spite of his crime, there was a great nobility in his bearing when we saw him. He only broke down, when one of us asked him if he would like his parents to be visited and told about him; or if he would wish to send them any message. We were both more deeply affected by his whole story, and by the fortitude with which he spoke to us, than it is possible to express in words. He was condemned to be hanged, but owing to the clemency of the Governor the sentence was commuted to penal servitude. We were very anxious about this Rajput's fate, when we left the Islands. The Governor had not yet consulted his Executive Council. But he was good enough to cable to us, on his own initiative, when our ship reached New Zealand, the news of the reprieve.

In connection with this case an extract may be given from a petition very fully signed by Indians in Fiji and endorsed by many Europeans.

Respectfully showeth:

That under the existing system of Indian labour immigration there is a great disproportion between the number of males and females.

That this disproportion is mostly responsible for the abnormal number of murders and kindred crimes among Indians

That the majority of those found guilty of such crimes are otherwise quiet and law-abiding; and the murders, for which they are condemned to death, are not due to any murderous instinct in them, but really to sexual jealousy.

That the proportion of crimes relative to the same class of people in India is, by far, much lower than in this Colony.

That in the Colony of Mauritius, for over five years past, there has not been a single trial of murder by Indians, who as a mass, belong to the same class as those in Fiji.

That the death sentence does not, as a matter of fact, seem to deter Indians from crime in this Colony, since the whole cause of the trouble here is sexual jealousy. . . .

This petition was very favourably reported in the Fiji newspapers, and leading Europeans in the Islands very warmly took up the matter of abolishing the death sentence in these murder cases. Many planters informed us that it was invariably the finest and best Indian coolies who committed these murders, never the worst. This was, to us, very striking news: its significance will be seen, when the criminal statistics are examined later on in the Report.

14. A Muhammadan Munshi, a cultured man and very intelligent, had been brought out under the promise that he would be given work in a *madrasa*. He had been appointed Sardar in the coolie "lines" and shewed us his notes which he had kept. He told us that the custom was general of a commission being paid to the Sardar by each coolie. Otherwise the Sardar was able to bring petty tyranny to bear on the coolie who did not pay. A much worse information, which he gave, was that the Sardars arranged, according to payment, the location of women with certain favoured men. We had further accounts of this at other centres, and from what we saw with our own eyes, within the "lines," concerning the relation of the Sardar to the coolies, it seemed to us not improbable. This Munshi had married by Muhammadan rites a wife, while still living in the coolie lines. But this wife would not, in the ordinary course of events, be set free, until two years after his own indenture had expired. We did our best to get her "commuted," as the situation appeared to us highly dangerous and the Munshi was a very respectable man.

15. A Panjabi, who was a thorough gentleman in his general bearing, had served for a considerable time in a Panjabi Regiment. He had been quartered at Delhi and gave us the names of his English officers and spoke of his Colonel with great warmth and affection. He had been brought out under the promise of regimental service abroad. The effect of military discipline in the past was noticeable. He had kept his respectability and neatness and good manners in the midst of the coolie "lines". He did not complain to us, but took it as his fate.

16. A young Madras Christian who had kept his good character spoke a little English and was fairly educated. This young lad was compelled by the Law of Indenture to live in the midst of grossly immoral surroundings for five years. There was a missionary near to these coolie "lines" who wished to buy him out and employ him as a catechist and teacher. While we were there he was able to do so, and the boy is now free. He told us he had been recruited under entirely false information concerning the life to which he was coming out.

17. A young highly educated Indian, who could write and speak English well, was soon recognised as unfit for agriculture, and was given important clerical work under Government. He was, however, kept strictly under indenture, and paid a lower salary than he would be entitled to as a free Indian. Recently he applied for a rise in salary and asked also to be allowed to commute his indenture: for he had been able to save up enough money for that purpose. The increase of salary was refused. He was further warned that, unless he gave satisfaction to Government, not only would his request for commutation be disallowed, but he might be sent back to the plantations under the Law of Indenture.

The fact that a responsible and well-disposed Gevernment, whose actions were on the whole kindly and considerate (as this Report will show), could offer such a threat to a highly educated man, struck us very much indeed. It seemed to bear out our contention, that a five years' indenture with penal clauses attached is a bondage.

These examples may be sufficient to illustrate the fact that recruiting, as at present carried on in India, is frequently

unscrupulous and that the indenture itself is neither a free nor an intelligent contract. So strongly did the facts about fraudulent recruiting come home to us that we felt the necessity to cable direct without delay to India, urging that such harmful practices should be stopped. We thought that this could only be accomplished by strong Indian public opinion expressing itself in vigorous action.

We were often asked, in Fiji, to explain how it was possible for the Indian coolies to pass through the examination of the Magistrate and doctor and emigration agent in India, without ever coming fully to understand what the exact conditions of labour in Fiji were. We have already pointed out the misleading character of the Government agreement itself; how it does not represent the true facts of life in Fiji. It is not unlikely that the doctor and Magistrate in India are more ignorant of the whole truth than those who drew up that agreement. But, beyond this, it is also probable that, in many cases, their official work is perfunctorily undertaken. How, otherwise, should we find a mere child (who could hardly have been more than 14 or 15) registered as 20 years of age? How could educated high-caste boys, whose very hands would show that they were unused to hard field labour, be sent out to work at the sugar-cane? We cannot avoid this inference from the actual cases that have been brought to our notice in Fiji. A conclusion still more serious, was this, that, in addition to collusion with the police, there was collusion with the subordinate officials of the larger central depots, in order to keep the hesitating coolies in a state of fear right up to the end. The stories about these subordinate officials, and their treatment of the coolies in the depot, were too circumstantial to leave much doubt in our own minds about the matter. Free Indians who had no reason for telling us anything but the truth, were equally clear on this point with those who were still under indenture. Even if the evidence of this corrupt practice were not conclusive, yet it made us feel strongly the imperative need of opening the depots much more freely than at present to the Indian public. We would also urge that, if recruiting still continues, a reference should be made to the village and family of each person who is taken into the depot, and that no one under the age of twenty should be recruited, except as a member of a family.

There have been lamentable and tragic cases of Indians, both men and women, who have thrown themselves into the Hughli, in order to escape from the emigrant ships, and also of actual suicides, occurring on the high seas. It is difficult to give details of these, because "deaths" are not separated from "suicides" and "desertions" on the ships' records. But we heard the account of one voyage in the year 1912 from an eyewitness, who could be trusted. He stated to us that one coolie had jumped overboard into the Hughli, and one woman had committed suicide at sea. We find in the Indian Immigration Report, 1912, in a paragraph referring to the voyage of Ganges I, the record that: "Two male immigrants from Madras, missing at different dates, were supposed to have been lost overboard." This may possibly be the voyage referred to, though the statements do not exactly tally.

We found out, in Fiji, another side of the coolie's difficulties, when he is first brought to the depot as a recruit. There is nearly always present among this class of Indian villagers (who rarely, if ever, in their lives come face to face with Englishmen) a very potent and peculiar fear of the Sahib. "Why did you not ask the Sahib to release you?" was the question which we very often used to put to individual coolies, who had told us about some pitiable fraud of the recruiting agent, practised upon them. The answer invariably came: "On account of fear." In one case, a woman told us how the recruiting agent had terrified her about the magistrate, assuring her that if she did not answer the magistrate's questions in a certain way, which he specified, the Sahib would put her into prison. We have discovered that a great fear comes over the coolies in the strange surroundings of the depot, and they look with dread on the functions and powers of the Sahib. Their one bewildered, dominant idea seems to be that they should try to please the Sahib at all costs. Sadly enough they have little idea when they answer, in the way the recruiting agent has instructed them, the Sahib's questions, that they are throwing away their last chance of release.

One further important point needs to be mentioned in order to make the picture complete. Besides the growth, when in the depot, of all this fear, suspicion and alarm, there is also a sense of hopelessness, like that of an animal who has been caught in a trap and has given up the useless struggle to

escape. Again and again, the indentured coolies explained to us this feeling, and there was a ring of truth about their utterance. It was their "fate"—so they spoke of it to us—and in that one word "fate" all the despair and misery of the situation seemed to be summed up. Those among them who were respectable women, had the overwhelming dread upon them that they would never again be taken back into their homes. Indeed, the recruiting agent appeared to know only too well that when once he had kept such a woman absent from her husband, even for a single night, the rest of his work would be comparatively easy. The woman would feel instinctively that her fate was sealed, and would give up any further efforts to get free.

We found one strangely inaccurate idea current among the planters in Fiji, namely, that a large proportion of those who have already been out once under indenture, return a second time. This erroneous statement was presented to us again and again as the basis of an argument. It was said that it would be quite impossible for the coolies in the various depots to remain unaware of the conditions of indentured labour in Fiji (even though these were not stated clearly in the agreement), because so many were continually returning under indenture, and such a class of men would not be likely to resist the temptation of telling all they knew to the others. Also a second argument was used with us: that the indenture system could not be so black as we painted it, because, in that case, so many coolies would not be likely to return under a new indenture.

It will be well to examine these arguments in the light of facts. The figures are available for the years 1912, 1913 and 1914.

In 1912, there were 3,402 Indian immigrants landed in Fiji, of whom 5 men, 5 women and 4 children had previously served or resided, in Fiji, *i.e.*, 10 adults out of a total of 3,402.

In 1913, there were 3,289 Indian immigrants who landed in Fiji, of whom 8 men, 2 women and 5 children had previously served, or resided, in Fiji, *i.e.*, 10 adults out of a total of 3,289.

In 1914, there were 1,572 Indian immigrants who landed in Fiji, of whom 19 men, 9 women and 4 children had

previously served, or resided, in Fiji, *i.e.*, 28 adults out of a total of 1,572.

Taking the year 1912, as a test of worth of the first argument (viz. that all the coolies in the various depots would be told the exact labour conditions in Fiji by returning immigrants), it will be seen how very unlikely it would be that five men (some of whom might have decided to go back at the last moment before the ship sailed) could have communicated detailed information about indentured labour in Fiji to 3,402 persons scattered over the depots of North India and Madras Presidency.

Considering the second argument, namely, that the conditions of indentured labour are so popular with those who have once experienced it, that large numbers go out a second time, the figures seem to prove the very opposite. For although the Indian coolies find by bitter experience, that they are outcaste and homeless on their return to India, they scarcely ever decide to go back again to Fiji. In the three years, for which statistics are available only 32 men out of 8,261 immigrants made up their minds to return under indenture.

We met one such, a Natal coolie, who had come out as an indentured immigrant to Fiji. He told us that he had first gone back from Natal to his home in Madras, but had been outcasted. He wished to marry, and to settle down in his village, but no one would receive him or marry him because he had broken caste. He spent what little money he had brought from Natal in trying to get back into caste, but all in vain. When all his money was spent, he came across a recruiting agent from Fiji, and in despair decided to go out again under indenture.

In the light of such an undoubtedly true narrative as this, it will be seen how little truth there is in the assumption, that all those, who come back to Fiji under indenture, do so because they are satisfied with the indenture system. This Natal coolie did not sign on again because he liked indentured labour, but because he had given up hope of being ever received back into his community in India. Among the almost infinitesimal proportion who do actually re-indenture in India, there must be some at least who have had that Natal coolie's experience.

As we have already stated, therefore, the facts, when examined, go against the very arguments which they are used to support. They tell the other way. And the assumptions are fallacious.

As, in a measure, a confirmation of this conclusion, that the indenture system is almost universally disliked by the coolies themselves, one of us, while talking with the overseer of a large estate in Fiji mentioned the word "commutation," suggesting that this should be always permitted (*i.e.* that coolies should be allowed to commute their time of service by payment of a sum of money). The overseer said significantly, "Why! The coolies in these lines would all commute to-morrow, if only they had the chance!"

There were many evidences in Fiji to show that recruiting in North India had become more and more unscrupulous in recent years. The number of mere lads that were now being sent out was significant. Women, also, had apparently been more difficult than ever to obtain, and the number of women of abandoned character seemed to be on the increase. It was noticeable, also, that the proportion of Madrasis had grown in comparison with Hindustanis. The reason of this has been clearly the rise of wages in North India. While the minimum wage of the indentured coolie in Fiji has remained stationary for thirty-two years, the wages of unskilled labour in the north of India have gone up, sometimes as much as 200 per cent. It is becoming more and more unlikely that the Indian peasant will go, of his own accord, thousands of miles across the sea, to obtain a wage distinctly less, in actual value, than that which he can get near at hand in his own motherland.

Why, for instance, should an able-bodied villager, from Gurgaon or Rohtak, go out across the seas to Fiji, in order to get a mere four rupees per week in wages, when he could get more money by levelling the soil at New Delhi, with wheat selling there at less than half the Fiji price. Clearly the fraud and lying must be very deep indeed, which can induce people to go out to Fiji, at a time when labour is so needed and wages are so high. Yet we found coolies who had been taken from the Delhi district. Their story was that they had been deceived by false prospects. Almost the same figures and rates might be quoted for the price of hired labour in Behar. Yet we found men and

women in Fiji who had been recently recruited from districts such as these. In each case which we enquired into, gross deception appeared to have been practised. The coolies complained, that they had not at all understood the kind of work which would be required of them, nor the price of food and clothing in Fiji, nor the penal clauses of indenture.

In South India there seems to be less evidence of fraudulent recruiting than in the North. Wages are much lower, and recruiters' work may be easier on that account. But it must be remembered also, that we could only converse easily with those Madrasis who had picked up a little knowledge of Hindustani; and we had practically no opportunity of hearing from the lips of Madrasi women their own account of how they were recruited. It should be added, that the introduction of Madrasis into Fiji has been accompanied by a distinct rise in the rates of suicide and violent crime. This has led to the opinion, now widely held among the planters in Fiji, that Madrasis are more prone to suicide and crimes of emotional violence than Hindustanis. We pointed out again and again, that this was not in accordance with the facts; because the suicide rate in the Madras Presidency was actually lower than that of the United Provinces and Behar. But the whole question of the suicide rate must be left over for the present. It will come up later in dealing with the proportion of the sexes.

Perhaps the most disconcerting effect of unscrupulous recruiting, in Fiji, is the distrust of Government which it has engendered among the indentured and free Indians alike. Government is regarded as having countenanced the deception of the recruiter and, in consequence, State officials are both feared and suspected. It is painful to find that the authorities are not looked upon by the Indians as their friends. Even the Agent-General of Immigration, whose duty it is to protect the interests of indentured Indians, is not exempt from this distrust. This is all the more discouraging, because the agent himself and his staff have every desire to do the Indians justice. Perhaps the most significant fact of all is, that the Indians who are on the staff, although full of sympathy towards their fellow countrymen, are regarded with something of the same distrust. They felt keenly the difficulty of this suspicious attitude, and spoke to us about it.

This distrust of Government has evidently started from the coolie "lines". But it has not by any means stopped there. It has continued to spread among the free Indians, even though there may be little occasion for it. The distrust is kept out of sight, or covered by outward complaisance because the free Indian cannot get rid of his servile tradition quickly, and is suspicious and afraid. The servile feeling, engendered in the coolie "lines" remains deep down in the heart, and it is a menace to successful administration.

To illustrate this point—we found invariably that whenever we went out with the Immigration officers, we could never get from the coolies any frank and open statements. It is impossible to describe in words their suspicious attitude—their sullen looks, their muttered whisperings. And then, on the other hand, we could see their changed faces, when they were positively certain, at last, that we had nothing to do with Government at all.

One of us had occasion to visit a free settlement of free Indians, who were living on their own land. The visit was made in company with an immigration officer, who had shown his sympathy with these same Indians on more than one occasion. Yet the whole visit was a failure, simply because of his presence. The free Indians remained silent and uncommunicative. Very early next morning, however, they sent a deputation, privately, to ask for another visit—only the Government official should not be present. In that case they promised to talk freely.

Not only in the country areas, but also in Suva, the capital, this suspicion lies very deep. It has already done untold injury to the contentment of the colony, and it will do far more unless it is speedily arrested.

The more carefully the whole question of recruitment is considered, the more clear it becomes, that to send out people of the coolie class from India as individuals, instead of in families, is wrong in principle. For they have never been accustomed to live as individuals. They have been used to the communal life. Women in India are all married at a very early age, and they are bound up with their families and their homes. Men also, in India, are usually married early and their life is bound up with their community. To recruit a man here

and a woman there, and to send them out to Fiji, away from all their communal and family ties, is certain to lead to misery in India, and also to immorality in Fiji. We found pitiable cases of men, who had been living with one woman after another in Fiji, while their own truly married wives and their legitimate children were deserted in India. We found equally pitiable cases of Hindu and Muhammadan wives reduced to leading a life of shame, while their true husbands were still living in India. These cases were all the more pitiable because the poor, ignorant coolies had apparently ceased to feel the moral degradation of it all.

The conclusion we reached on the whole subject was that men and women from India should either be recruited by families, or not at all.

We obtained in Fiji a considerable body of evidence with regard to conditions of life on board the large emigrant vessels, which carry the indentured coolies. After discounting a great deal, as probably due to exaggeration, the strong impression was still left in our minds, that little care is taken of the privacy of the women and of the manner of cooking the emigrants' food. We ourselves saw something of these conditions on our way to and from South Africa, and we could understand what the coolies, in Fiji told us. Many said that they had been obliged during the voyage out to give up their old Hindu habit of taking only vegetable food. Some who regarded it as a sin to take animal food, went through tortures of fear; for even if meat were not actually present in the food, they were afraid that animal fat might have been used while cooking it. The strict Hindu suffered accordingly. We were told in Fiji that a very large percentage of Hindus began to abandon their vegetarian habits from the time of the voyage out. It was a strange sight for us to see a butcher's shop in Suva, where beef as well as mutton was being sold, crowded with Hindus waiting eagerly to obtain their purchases of meat.

Even more serious, on board ship, as far as we could gather on enquiry, was the little care taken of the modesty of Indian women. Abandoned women were mixed up in the same quarters with those who were respectable. Temptation to evil was ever present. We had facts given to us on this point which were the plain records of eye-witnesses themselves, and not likely to be untrue.

Lastly, the number of deaths on board, among those who had quite recently been twice passed by the Doctor as medically sound, tells its own story. We were informed by trustworthy people in Fiji, who had themselves made the voyage out as free Indians, that the vice and misery on board the emigrant vessels were deplorable. The following are the statistics for the years 1912 to 1914 with regard to the deaths on the voyage out and in the depot on arrival.

Out of 3,428 emigrants embarked in 1912, 27 "deaths, desertions or missing" occurred on the voyage; 22 deaths (20 of which were children) occurred in the depot at Suva, and 9 unallotted immigrants died in the Colonial Hospital: a total of 58, or one immigrant in 60.

Out of 3,306 immigrants embarked in 1913, 21 "deaths, desertions or missing" occurred on the voyage. Eleven deaths (six of which were children) occurred in the depot at Suva, and 15 unallotted immigrants died in the Colonial Hospital; a total of 47, or one in 70.

Out of 1,572 immigrants embarked in 1914, six "deaths, desertions or missing" occurred on the voyage. Three deaths (all children) occurred in the depot, and two unallotted immigrants died in the Colonial Hospital; a total of 11, or one in 143.

One of the persistent features, which has marked the indentured system from the beginning, has been the low proportion of adult women to adult men. There have been financial reasons to account for this. For although the cost of the voyage out is the same for a woman as for a man, the amount of work which a woman can do is much less than that of a man. Where, therefore, cheap labour is the first concern, it is inevitable that the employer should aim at getting the largest possible number of men.

Thus the low proportion of indentured women is not something accidental, which can be abandoned without modifying the system. Rather, it is an integral factor in the system itself, which, apart from this paucity of women, could not be run at the high profits required by the employers. The moment that we suggested to the planters in Fiji such reforms as would help to make a decent family life possible among the coolies, we were met on all sides with the word "impossible". The expense, they declared, would be prohibitive.

The Indian Government has been blamed for allowing such a low proportion, as that of forty adult women to every hundred men, to continue for so long unaltered. But it should be remembered to Government's credit, that it, and it alone, has prevented the proportion from falling much lower still. If the employers as a body had had their own way in the past, there can be little doubt that they would have brought the rate down long ago to twenty-five per cent, or even less. Even to-day, the temptation is a pressing one, to pass out the emigrant ships with something slightly less than the regulation number of women.

This introduces another important consideration, which shows still more clearly how the whole Indian indenture system in its practical working hangs together. With the method invariably adopted hitherto of recruiting individuals, rather than whole families, it has been found exceedingly difficult to obtain in India even as many as forty women for each hundred men, without drawing largely on the prostitute class. Out on the plantations, we have been told, it is this very class which is actually needed in order to make the indenture system work. It is utterly repugnant to us to be obliged to enter into details on such a subject, and we shall do so as sparingly as possible. But it will easily be seen, that when the stronger men on an estate have taken to their own possession an equal number of women, the remainder of the adult women find themselves still more unequally matched in number. The disproportion rises as high as one woman to four, or even to five, men. In these circumstances, the remark of one employer can be understood without comment.—When one of us spoke to him about recruiting no more abandoned women, he demurred and answered, "Why! The system couldn't go on without them." We heard of one estate where the overseer made the regular practice, in order to keep peace in the "lines," of allotting so many men to each single woman. This amounted to regulated prostitution.

We had both of us already witnessed in Natal the moral evils, in the coolie quarters, connected with this disproportion of men to women. We had received, also, invaluable help from Mr. Gandhi, who was the first to make clear to us the far-reaching effects of these evils upon the free Indians. But what we have now seen with our own eyes in Fiji, is far worse than

anything we had ever seen before. The moral evil in Fiji appears to have gone much deeper.

We cannot forget our first sight of the coolie "lines" in Fiji. The looks on the faces of the men and the women alike told one unmistakable tale of vice. The sight of young children in such surroundings was unbearable to us. And, again and again, as we went from one plantation to another, we saw the same unmistakable look. It told us of a moral disease which was eating into the heart and life of the people.

What else could be expected? Indian villagers, who have lived in communal life of their own Indian homes, are first taken away, one from here, and one from there, by the recruiting agents. They are completely separated from all their old ties and associations. Then they are crowded together on board the great emigrant ships, where decency can hardly be preserved, and every temptation is rife. Lastly in Fiji itself, they are crowded again into the coolie "lines," which are more like stables than human dwellings; and there they are forced by law to remain, away from every restraint of custom or religion, during a period of five years. What else could be expected? But, that little children should be born and brought up in this——

Though we were no novices to conditions such as these, yet what we met with in Fiji was far worse than we had ever anticipated. There seemed to be some new and indefinable factor added—some strange unaccountable epidemic of vice. We felt that vice was spreading, like a blight, over the Indian population of Fiji. We began to fear that it would spread still further to the indigenous Fijian population; and we found that our fears were already shared by others.

The demand was made quite insistently by the planters that we should explain to them the reason for the suicidal tendency among the indentured coolies in Fiji. The long, never-ending roll of these suicides had shocked the Government; and the planters had felt it deeply also.

We were able to assure the Government on one point. As far as we could see, there was much less actual ill-treatment of indentured coolies than we had come across in Natal. The only reports that reached us, which approached the Natal plantations in this respect, were those that came from Navua.

Furthermore, we were both of us quite clear in our own minds, that the inspection of the plantations was much more carefully carried out by the Immigration Department in Fiji than in Natal.

Thirdly, much less racial feeling existed in Fiji than we had met in South Africa. There was more humanity towards the Indians. The race question did not come up with any great acuteness.

All these important things would have led us to expect, that the lot of Indians in Fiji would be happier, and therefore the temptation to commit suicide would be less marked. But as we have said, our actual experience led us to believe that the moral evil had gained a far stronger hold in the "coolie" lines of Fiji than it had done in Natal. And, unfortunately, Government statistics only confirmed this impression.

It may be well before going further to give a very brief summary of the outstanding facts concerning suicide and crime among indentured Indians in Fiji.

In India itself, which is predominantly Hindu by religion, suicide is a very rare occurrence. The Hindu has a deep religious and moral objection to taking life, regarding it as a sin. For this reason, the Indian suicide rate is probably the lowest in the world. Only one in every twenty thousand commits suicide in India, or 50 per million per annum. Among the indentured Indians in Fiji one in every 950 has committed suicide in each year, or over one thousand per million per annum. This is the average taken for the last eight years. To put it in other words, the suicide rate is twenty times as great as that of India. These figures remain the same if only the two recruiting provinces of India are taken.

With regard to the crime of murder, the facts are even more startling. In the United Provinces and Madras there is only one conviction for murder in every 250,000 people each year, or four per million per annum. In Fiji among the indentured coolies, there has been one conviction for murder each year in every 3,000 persons, or 333 per million per annum. That is to say, the murder rate in Fiji is eighty times as high as that of India. It is noticeable that the greater portion of people murdered are women. On the other hand, almost all the suicides in Fiji are those of men. In India, what few suicides exist are generally those of women.

If we make every possible allowance for minor inaccuracies these figures for suicide and murder remain very disconcerting. They are not the figures for a single year, but an average for a considerable number of years, and it is significant that the last years are the worst.

To take, for instance, the last recorded year, that of 1914: out of 15,603 indentured coolies in Fiji, eleven committed suicide, seven attempted to commit suicide, ten were convicted of committing murder, seven were murdered, twenty-seven were convicted of the violent crime of wounding, thirteen were wounded, two were convicted of man-slaughter, and three were killed by man-slaughter. The number of coolies actually charged in Court for committing these crimes, together with those who suffered under them, amounted to nearly one hundred persons. This means that one in every 140 of the adult indentured coolies in Fiji, during the year 1914, were involved in violent crime, ending in murder, man-slaughter, suicide, or violent bodily assault.

Sadly enough, it is not possible to obtain a complete record even with such authenticated figures as these. For in spite of the evident desire on the part of Government to give accurate returns, it is practically impossible to do so in the present condition of Fiji. Magistrates are very few in number, and plantations are often far away from any centre. Hospitals, also, belong to the employers, not to Government. It is all to the interest of the planter to hush up serious crime on his estate; and in recent years, when the indenture system itself has been known by every planter to be in danger, the temptation to hide facts, which might tell against the system, must have been very great indeed. That these statistics are as accurate as they are, must be put down to the credit of the Planters as well as to Government. But to give one example of the minimising tendency at work, which came under our own observation, a planter told one of us in the course of ordinary talk, the story of an attempted suicide on his estate, and when we asked him if he had informed Government, he said he had not. One actual suicide, also, was reported to us both, when we were in different parts of Fiji, long before any news of it had reached the Immigration office. We were ourselves the first to give them the report.

Very often a cutting from a newspaper gives the true situation more clearly to an outsider than statistics. For it adds the atmosphere of the place, and is not a bare record of figures. The following is taken from the, *Western Pacific Herald* :

> News has just reached Suva of another of those "cutting up" incidents, so common amongst Indians in Fiji, which occurred on the Waidoi Estate. In this case the motive is the usual one of jealousy, a woman being the victim and a man the aggressor. Although badly hacked the woman is expected to recover. We understand that the owners of the estate were aware that trouble was brewing, but were prevented by the regulations from removing the man to another plantation, which action would have prevented the crime. Another aspect of the case is that if the assailant is sentenced to more than six months, his employers suffer by losing the time, as the indentures cannot be extended for a longer period than six months. The law as it stands has an undoubted tendency to encourage the employer to hush up any such cases which may occur amongst his labourers.

It is clear from this cutting, that however anxious the Immigration Department may be to get at the true facts, their difficulties in Fiji are exceptional. It will be made abundantly clear in this report how scrupulously just and fair this Department itself was. Nevertheless allowance will have to be made for the carelessness and neglect on the part of planters to send to the office every case of crime which occurred on their estate.

When we came to examine further the reasons for the almost complete breakdown of moral sanctions in Fiji, which had resulted in such criminal records, we found ourselves more and more bewildered about the causes, though more certain than ever about the facts.

We were wholly unable to agree with one explanation, which was most frequently put before us, namely, that the Indians recruited for Fiji, were the criminal class of India. We have already expressed our opinion concerning the Indian women. From them, indeed, we did undoubtedly gain an impression that the number of prostitutes recruited must have been large, perhaps in excess of Natal, or elsewhere. It also appeared to us, that this number was increasing, rather than diminishing. If so, that might itself account for a great deal.

But the men recruited were rather above, than below, the type we saw in Natal. The Hindustanis represented a class of

villagers whom we knew well in India: and these certainly did not come, in any large proportion, from the lowest stratum of Hindu society. Those whom we saw in the Calcutta Depot were villagers of a good class. The coolies also in the Madras Depot appeared to be an average village type. It is interesting to note how the Fiji newspapers have spoken of the recent shiploads of recruits as "an exceptionally fine set" or as "above the average". Yet it is these very Hindustanis and Madrasis who so quickly go to pieces, and even in their first and second years begin committing suicide and stabbing and murdering their fellows.

We were told again and again by barristers who practised in the Law Courts, by Government officials, and by merchants, that the Indian had become "the criminal of Fiji;" that it would be no exaggeration to say that over 90 per cent of the violent crime in the Islands was "Indian crime"; that there was a real danger that this disease of "Indian crime" would spread to the aborigines. We found also that the Indians had got the reputation of being "the greatest gamblers in the Colony," and from what we saw in the coolie "lines," there can be little doubt that this reputation was not unfounded.

But by far the most terrible fact, which met us on every side, like a great blight or devastation, was the loss of any idea of the sanctity of marriage and the consequent sexual immorality that was rampant on every side. The evil had spread in wider and wider circles from the coolie "lines," till it had infected nearly the whole Indian population. Some one has described the condition of the sexes in the coolie lines of Fiji as the "morals of the poultry yard," and the phrase sticks in the mind: it is so painfully accurate of much that we were obliged to see and hear.

We had at first supposed that these corrupt morals of the "lines" would be thrown off, in a great measure, by a healthy reaction, as soon as the Indian became a free man. In Natal this had been the case, and we had seen with our own eyes fairly healthy family life springing up in the numerous tiny fruit-farms around Durban, where free Indians lived. But we found things far more unsatisfactory in Fiji. There, the morals of the coolie "lines" had become ingrained in the free population. As one Indian explained the matter to us: "Sahib," he said, "our women have lost all shame; they

change their husbands as they change their dress." An abominable trafficking in young girls was prevalent, which the law seemed unable to check. It was a common thing for a father to sell his daughter to one man, allowing the betrothal ceremony to be performed, and then to sell her to another. Divorces were equally common. Women left their husbands for the sake of jewellery and went to live with other men. They seemed to do just what they pleased, and to live just as they liked. Castes and religions were mixed together in a common jumble. Hindu girls were sold in marriage to Muhammadans and *vice versa*: sweepers' children were sometimes married to Brahmans. If this admixture had been due to enlightened motives of humanity and in accordance with conscience, all might have been well. But it was just the reverse—a matter of greed and lust. As if to make the evil more deep-seated, Government had done its best to banish Hindu and Muhammadan religious marriage altogether from the land. Indian Christian marriage shared the same fate in the eyes of the law. A Christian minister of religion, Mr. Bavin, who performed the ceremony of marriage for two Indian Christians in Church, was prosecuted for committing an illegal act. The only valid marriage was said to be that drawn up in the Immigration Department, and this was a mere matter of payment and registration. An Indian had merely to go to the Immigration office and register his name and that of his intended wife, and pay five shillings. Then if no objection was lodged, after three weeks he received a certificate from the office declaring that he had been married. There was no ceremony: no solemn declaration: no mutual promise in the presence of witnesses. These Immigration Department marriages are called by the Indians "marit"; and it was always necessary in Fiji to ask a man, or woman, if they had a "marit"—for nothing else was legal. In the prosecution referred to above, the insecurity and the degradation to the whole Indian community of this system was exposed in open court. A new marriage ordinance is now in the making, which recognises the religious ceremony of each Indian religion, and gives to it the respect that is due. But the harm that has been done during the last thirty-two years by this neglect of the State authorities to give any sanction at all to Hindu, Muhammadan and Indian Christian religious marriage can hardly be overestimated.

The following story was told to us by a missionary, who knew the two brothers concerned, and tried to get their sentences commuted. Two brothers of a respectable Hindu family were guardians of their younger sister. They caused her to be married by Hindu religious rites to a husband whom they regarded as suitable. The Hindu religious ceremony was fully and duly performed. Then another man intervened and induced the sister to be married to him by means of a "marit" at the Immigration office. This "marit" was legal. The Hindu marriage was illegal. There was no redress. When the brothers knew that there was no other remedy, they went and killed their sister and gave themselves into custody. They declared at the trial that they had done it for the honour of their family and their religion. They had done it they said, to preserve Dharma. They were condemned to be hanged.

The following documents may serve to illustrate the confusion which has been reached in the Indian marriage relations in Fiji.

1. Memorandum of Agreement for Separation.

Made this eighteenth day of April 1913 between Jammu ex Fultala III and Parbati ex Fazilka IV, husband and wife.

It is hereby agreed as follows, after full understanding and consent :

(*a*) That in consideration of the sum of £10-0-0 this day paid to Jammu by Parbati the former relinquishes all his rights over Parbati as wife and gives her permission to go wherever she pleases and live with whomsoever she likes. He will not sue her for damages in any court of law or take any legal action against her.

(*b*) That Parbati relinquishes all rights over Jammu as her husband and gives him permission to go wherever he pleases and live with whomsoever he likes. She will not sue him for damages in any court of law or take any legal action against him.

Thumb mark of Jammu	Government Stamp	Thumb mark of Parbati

[These agreements are, in the actual practice of Islands, equivalent to a divorce; at least they are so regarded by all

indentured coolies. They are drawn up by certain barristers-at-law practising in Suva and are signed in their presence. The paraphernalia of the Government stamp and the legal form, in which they are inscribed, make the illiterate Indians believe that they are valid in a court of law. We have been told by lawyers since, that they are not worth the paper on which they are written. Yet the charge of £5 is made to the coolies for them.]

2. A letter to the Agent-General of Immigration.

SIR,

There is a man called Assu, ex Fultala I, intending to leave for India. His daughter Jagwanti has been married to my son, Nathu, according to Hindu rites, and this marriage will have to be registered according to the law of this Colony.

I have spent £30-0-0 for this marriage and as I apprehend that the girl's mother, Jamuni, is likely to sell her to some one else than my son, I request you to be so kind as to help me by taking steps to secure an undertaking by Assu that during his absence nothing will happen to defraud me of my lawful rights.

I beg to suggest that he should be made to give me a written acknowledgment of the expense incurred by the said marriage.

3. Letter threatening legal proceedings.

To Lakshmi ex Fazilka III.

You are my married wife. You have deserted me without any reason or excuse. I hereby notify to you that you must return and co-habit with me within one week of delivery of this notice; otherwise you must return me the jewellery, valued £20-0-0, which you had from me for wear, also the sum of £30-0-0 in cash taken away by you from our home, also our daughter Sunderbasia, aged 7 years, with jewellery valued £10-0-0 which she wears.

(Sd.) Indrua—his mark.

4. Memorandum of Agreement.

Between Idu 33,193 and his wife Rajwantia 36,987 and Lachman ex Sangola V.

That in consideration of the sum of £5-0-0 paid this day to Idu by Lachman and of the jewellery returned to Idu by Rajwantia, Idu gives up all his rights over Rajwantia, as his wife etc. etc.

5. Charge or complaint.

Fiji, to wit:

The charge of Assu in the district of Suva, taken this twenty-seventh day of March, in the year of our Lord 1913 before me, who saith that Bhikari, ex Clyde I, now residing with a man called Durgan, did on or about the 26th day of March instant steal, or convert, to her own use, one shikri valued 10 shillings, one pair of jhumka worth 7 shillings etc..... belonging to one Idu.....

(This is one of the very common charges for return of jewellery made by a husband, when his wife leaves him.)

6. The case of a Sardar.

Letter No. 1.

To the Agent-General of Immigration, 22nd June, 1914.

Sir,

The bearers, Lachmania, ex Ganges II, and Puran, ex Ganges I, say as follows:

That Lachmania has been excused from work since her arrival in the Colony. At first she was told to live with the man called Debi Singh, who was given up at the instance of the Sardar in favour of the bearer Puran who paid £2-10-0 as the price of the woman's exemption from work for one year.

The said Sardar now desires the woman to give up Puran, with the intention of keeping the woman for himself.

The woman does not want to give up Puran.....

Letter No. 2.

From Immigration Department. 25th June, 1914.

Sir,

I have to state that Puran had previously complained to this Department regarding the Sardar's treatment of the woman

Lachmania, and his complaint was inquired into, with the result that his allegations against the Sardar were proved to be false.

Letter No. 3.

From the Manager, 18th November, 1914.

(Concerning another woman named Jagwanti and the same Sardar.)

I am in receipt of your letter, which seems to have been written by you under the misapprehension that Bhola and Jagwanti were husband and wife at the time the Sardar made overtures to the woman to live with him. Bhola has informed me that these overtures were made with his consent. Since Bhola and Jagwanti are now married, the Sardar will have nothing further to do with the woman.

Letter No. 4.

From the same Sardar. 29th March, 1915.

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that Bhola came to me this morning and asked me for the money, but I told him to go to you. I asked Jagwanti to come with me to court for the marriage, but she told me that she will see about it by and by. By this I understand that she wants to live with Madho, after being paid the sum. About the money I have nothing to say. Do, please, as you like. Will you please put this condition more in the agreement between me and Bhola and Jagwanti, that, after having been paid the sum by me, if anybody will keep the woman, he will have to pay me £50-0-0.

[We wish to draw no inferences as to the rights and wrongs in this case, but simply to show from it the utterly abandoned morals of the "lines". We heard of more than one case in which the Sardar sold the women, under his charge, first to one man and then to another.]

It would be impossible to explain in detail, how all these evils connected with marriage have penetrated the home-life of the free Indian population, as well as the coolie "lines". We had opportunities of studying in Suva these strange marriage relations in that centre of free Indians. We also went carefully

through files of correspondence, agreements and settlements, by which Indians were struggling, either to strengthen or else to relax these complicated marriage ties. We examined, besides, a large volume of evidence given in the Police courts. We were thus able to see in detail how sexual jealousy had brought about all kinds of misery and crime.

It would be scarcely too much to say, that these marriage evils have almost obliterated the ideal of the married life from the memory of Hindus in Fiji. They spoke to us of marriage and of women in a way that would be revolting to Hindus in India. The tragedy of it all was this, that the whole Hindu fabric had gone to wreck on this one rock of marriage, and there were no leaders to bring the people back into the right paths. The best Hindus we met were in despair about it.

One other aspect of this same deterioration may be described. The Hindu woman in the coolie "lines" having no semblance, even, of a separate home of her own, which she can cherish, and divorced from all her old home ties, has abandoned religion itself. The moral ruin is most pitiful on this side. Though there are beautiful and stately rivers in Fiji, no women are seen making their morning offerings: no temples rise on their banks: there is no household shrine. The outward life, which the Hindu women in the "lines" lead in Fiji, appears to be without love and without worship—a sordid round of mean and joyless occupations. The contrast with India is seen in its saddest form during some so-called Hindu religious festivals in Fiji. Everything that could be recognised as Hindu has departed, and with this, the religious spirit has departed also. The yearly round of the sacred festivals, which form so much of the brightness of a Hindu woman's life in India, is confined in Fiji to a couple of days, of which the greatest is no Hindu festival at all. The impoverishment of life, which has taken place, can hardly be understood, in all its pathos, except by Hindus themselves. One who had recently come out to Fiji from Madras, a man of education, wrote as follows: "These festivities are meaningless in Fiji, with no object but to partake in sweetmeats and rowdy cries. Indian women are present with no intent to worship, but to a great degree as a spectacle to the white population, who view with an inborn hateful laugh the coolie Indians and their so-called religion. Hindu degradation could not go lower."

Yet, as we went further in our enquiries, we met with hopeful signs of another kind, which showed us that there was still present, below the surface, the instinct and the memory of better things. We saw many lives of Hindu women, which were true to Hindu traditions, winning reverent respect.

A high caste widow and her little daughter, who had passed through the moral dangers of the coolie "lines" unharmed, were reverenced by all the Hindus of the district. When misfortune came upon this widow while we were in Fiji, her Hindu neighbours came to us, offering monetary help up to 4,500 rupees. They wished to purchase for her the small portion of land, which her husband and her father had possessed. A Madrasi Hindu mother, in the North of the main Island, had gathered round her, in an out-building, a group of Hindu boys, to teach them their religion, together with a little English.

Among the men, a Swami, loosely attached to the Arya Samaj in India, and now dwelling in Suva, had gained instant respect from the Hindus, and had helped in founding schools, where religion could be taught. On every hand we found a longing for instruction to be given in religion, and this clearly proceeded from a pure desire, that the children of Hindu parents in Fiji should not lose all knowledge of their ancestral faith. It was touching to see what emphasis was laid upon religion in their own education schemes.

Two phrases were constantly used in Fiji, when thoughtful Indians talked over the whole matter intimately with us. The one implied that all their religion had gone to pieces. The other implied that they had not lost their inner appreciation of their old Hindu life.

The Muhammadans were very slightly represented in the main Island of Fiji. We should have seen them in much greater strength, if we had been able to go to the smaller Islands; but time would not allow this. In the main Island, as far as we could observe, the religious decline had not been so rapid with them as amongst Hindus. They held together more, and even though they did not observe, to any great extent, the stated hours of prayer, yet they were proud of the fact that they were Musalmans, and this gave them a dignity of their own. There were very few leaders among them. They seemed capable of getting on by themselves and of keeping some idea of religion.

They were equally eager, with the Hindus, to obtain religious education for their children.

The Indian Christians were fewer still in number. Some of them held too much aloof from the main Indian body and were inclined to lean upon European support. But one feature was outstanding. Their home life was good. Some of our happiest recollections were those of Indian Christian homes.

The Parsis, to our regret, were entirely absent from the Island. We could not help remembering Parsi Rustomji, in Durban, and wishing that there might be such a kindly Parsi home as his, in Suva, to give us welcome.

The brightest side of Indian life in Fiji (which, in a measure compensated for its sorrows and gave hope for the future) was the love of India itself, which was still kept warm within every heart. There was practically no religious bitterness; Hindus, Muhammadans and Christians lived amicably together side by side, because the one tie of India itself bound them together in one. This love for India kept their lives sweet, even in the midst of so much that was corrupt and diseased.

In so far as it is possible to shorten the passage to India by direct Steamer Service, and thus give opportunity to the younger generation of Indians to see their motherland, it will be all to the good. For there is no sentiment, at the present time, that is doing more to uphold the self-respect of Indians in Fiji than this affection for India. With many whom we met—men who have lost for a time all the sanctions of religion—this sentiment itself has become a religion and a worship. Things can never be hopeless with Indians in Fiji, so long as this remains.

There was another aspect of affairs in Fiji, which corrected our earlier unfavourable impression in an important way, and gave us encouragement and hope. We noticed that, whenever those who had come out of indenture were given opportunities to settle on the land, holding it as their own and leading their own free life upon it, the powers of recuperation very soon began to have their effect. We were more and more impressed with this fact, the longer we stayed in Fiji. It made us feel quite convinced, that if only the fatal mistakes of the present indenture could be rectified, the Indian immigrants

might then recover themselves and become a healthy population. We were equally convinced by what we saw that this life settlement on the land could never be made really wholesome, if it were connected with the present coolie "lines". For the evils of "lines" extended outwards, and brought degradation to the free Indians who were near at hand. It also made many of the free Indians the mere hawkers and hangers-on of the coolie "lines".

[It may be well to mention here, in a parenthesis, one of the most marked and painful features of Indian life in Fiji, which immediately attracted our attention. The whole Indian population is divided up into two classes, an inferior and a superior, called "indentured" and "free"—"grimit-wala," and "khalas"—to give them their local names. One does not need to labour the point, that to have people of one race in a small Island, some of whom are free and some of whom are the reverse, is to countenance a most injurious class distinction.

Though we found abundant sympathy among the free Indians with their less fortunate countrymen, and though we came across noble instances of self-sacrifice on their behalf, yet it was almost inevitable that such an unnatural division should tell, in time, upon them, and should give to the indentured Indians a sense of degradation, and to the free Indians a sense of pride. It was often noticeable to us, how an Indian would bristle up, if ever we made the mistake of asking him if he was "grimit-wala" when he was really "khalas"; or how, on the other hand, a man would hang his head, if we said to him "Tum khalas ho?" when he had not yet obtained his freedom. There would be shame and dejection expressed in the very shake of his head, as he sadly confessed to us that he was still under indenture. Few things told us more truly than this what was actually going on beneath the surface of people's minds.

Far deeper evils still were connected with this class division, which can only be mentioned very briefly. It brought out too often in the free Indians, not those noble qualities of sympathy and sacrifice which have been referred to, but those meaner qualities of avarice and greed—the readiness, for the sake of money, to exploit and trade upon the weak and depressed. There is always something very dangerous in the close juxtaposition of a privileged and an unprivileged class, a servile and a free

population; and it is not to be wondered at, if Indians, with their morals already corrupted by five years' indenture, should not be able to resist the dangers of their new position when they became free.]

But where the contact with the coolie "lines" was not especially marked, the healthy life of settlement on the soil soon began to have its effect on Indians who had finished their indenture. This was especially noticeable in certain out-of-the-way settlements, away from the coast, on the north side of the Island. Nature has wonderful healing powers, and we witnessed them at work. The difficulties concerning the marriage of children were still serious, on account of the complete disproportion of men to women in Fiji, among free, as well as among indentured, Indians. But as life settled down, and more and more children were born, even these difficulties became successfully surmounted, and a new life of hopefulness began to spring up in these new Indian settlements far away from anywhere. It was one of the greatest pleasures of our visit to come across some such Indian settlement cleared out of the very jungle. It recalled to our minds many of the best features of village life in India itself.

It was very interesting and instructive to watch the difference between these Indians settled, far away from anywhere, on the land, and those Indians who hung about the outskirts of the coolie "lines". Among the free Indians, at the coolie centres, there had been little or no purging out the moral evils of the coolie "lines". The bad atmosphere of the "lines" still clung round about them. But face to face with nature, and close to mother earth, the free Indians, while they tilled their own land and built their own villages, in their own way, recovered a healthier and cleaner moral life. The aspect of joy came back into the women's faces and into the looks of the children at their play. The impression of servitude and moral degradation was lost, and a new found happiness and pleasure in life had clearly taken its place. In one part of the country we found that a little temple had been built in the middle of such a Hindu village. This showed us that religion itself had begun once more to take its true place in Hindu homes.

A few examples may be given of the state of affairs here generally described.

1. A small cultivator on the north side of the main Island had a small holding of his own, purchased by promissory notes. He was a sweeper, and did work in a store as well as on his own land. He had been eleven years in Fiji and had received 800 rupees for his last crop. He spoke of further transactions in land to the extent of 1,500 rupees. He was very happy and prosperous, and his wife and daughter seemed equally happy as they were seen by us on the day of the Muharram festival.

2. A village settlement, five miles from Navua, which had originally been formed by a small syndicate of four Indians who were now Zamindars. The ground was all free-hold property and the crops looked very flourishing indeed. There had been unfortunately some quarrel between the Indians about the land. Though there was outward prosperity, there was clearly inward discontent. Probably the settlement was too near to the large coolie "lines" to be completely independent, and Navua, as a district, bore an evil reputation.

3. A small settlement of Indians completely isolated and independent, far in the interior of the Island. There was an air of quiet peace and happiness about this village which touched us very deeply, after what we had seen for so long in the coolie "lines". Then men and women spoke with freedom, and the children were evidently happy.

4. The following are typical cases of prosperous growers of sugar-cane among the Indians in the north of the Island:

Lachman has been three years out of indenture and was able to sell his cane last year for Rs. 1,635.

Nathu, who has been five years out of indenture, has grown 531 tons of sugar-cane on twenty-three acres of land. He received for his crop Rs. 7,200. This man sold out his interest in the land and its standing crops for Rs. 13,500.

Ram Singh told us, that he had received Rs. 12,000 for his last year's crop. This sum however does not represent net profit. An encouraging fact in his case was that he was following the example of the large European planters in his cane cultivation by an extensive use of green manure. The small Indian holders, we were told, had not made sufficient use of scientific cultivation, with the inevitable result that their

crops are inferior in quality, and the soil is gradually becoming impoverished.

[In 1914 independent Indian growers of cane supplied to the Company's mills at Lautoka, on the north side of the Island, a total of 32,328 tons of cane, which realised 2,85,000 rupees, at an average of eleven shillings and eightpence per ton. In 1915 from the same source the estimate was 47,000 tons of cane which would realise 5,40,500 rupees at an average of fifteen shillings and fourpence per ton. In this Lautoka district 34 per cent of the total sugar-cane land is already in Indian hands, and all along the north coast the percentage is ever increasing. In the district of Nadi alone there is a population of 5,000 free Indians and the monthly average applications for leases of land at the Magistrate's court was fifty. There are thus a large number of free Indians who are now growing sugar-cane, quite independently, on holdings varying from five to three hundred acres in extent. The large Indian cultivators employ numbers of free Indians to carry on the ploughing, manuring, weeding and cutting of the cane.]

5. A settlement of free Indians on the border of a small European plantation. These have recently come out of indenture and settled near their old employer. The planter gave to them, at a very low rate, during the last year of their indenture, a piece of ground for growing cane. He now uses their free labour, at the heavy seasons of the year, paying them full wages. In this way, he has been able to reduce the number of coolies under indenture on his estate. The Indians seemed prosperous and contented. The planter was evidently their friend, and they were some distance away from any large coolie " lines ".

[The Colonial Sugar Refining Company has for some years past introduced this system of settling indentured Indians on the land, near to their own estates, during the last year of their indenture. They pick out carefully those coolies who show capacity for work among the canes. In Lautoka 2,200 acres are thus leased out to 180 Indians under the Company's settlement scheme.]

From all this it will be clear that every year the interests of the Indian free settler will have to be taken into consideration in an increasing measure. For in the long run, if the

present rate of progress continues, they will be the chief growers and producers of cane in the Islands. Indeed, the time may be not far distant, when the European cane grower will give place to the Indian altogether, the organising work at the centres alone remaining in the Europeans' hands. If the new offer of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to place £100,000 at a low rate of interest at the disposal of the Fiji Government for Indians' settlement be accepted and the settlement carried out, this predominance of the Indian cultivator as a grower of sugar-cane for the Company's Mills will be practically assured.

While, on the whole, with many drawbacks and difficulties, the land settlement of Indians has gone forward, the same cannot be said with regard to Indian education. Indeed it would be hardly an exaggeration to state that the policy of the Government of Fiji with regard to Indian education has been, up till quite recently, one of almost complete neglect. Even with reference to the public school education of European children, Fiji is far behind every other colony in the Empire. With regard to Indian children, in spite of strong warnings from the Indian Government and the Home authorities, the expenditure has hitherto been *nil.* We have been told further, on reliable authority, that for many years there was the strongest opposition on the part of the Sugar Companies to any education being given to Indians at all. It was said that such education would tend to take the Indian coolie away from the soil, and thus make him "spoilt" for labour purposes. If the European sentiment with regard to Indian education has somewhat changed to-day in Fiji, it is due to two chief causes—first, the brave struggle which the missionaries made against unenlightened opposition, and, secondly, the strong external pressure which has been brought to bear upon the Fiji Government by the Colonial Office in London. We may well believe, also, that the criminal statistics of the Indian population have at last begun to make people think. When we were asked to explain the suicide and crime among Indians in Fiji, compared with other colonies, we used to point to the education statistics. The absence of school life means the absence also of educated teachers as well as of the school house. The teacher and his wife are apt to set the standard to other families round them.

Their home is often a centre of great good in an illiterate community.

In the Fiji Blue Book for 1914 two pages only are given for education. From the figures it appears that there are only two aided Public schools and one Government school in the colony. The rest of the education is left entirely to private enterprise.

Out of a total revenue of £279,844 in 1914, the sum of only £3,312 was devoted to education, or less than 1·2 per cent of the total revenue; and none of this was for Indian education. In Suva itself, the capital of the Islands, the anomaly occurred not long ago of rates being actually collected from Indian rate-payers for public school purposes, without permission being given to the children of such rate-payers to enter a public school. On an appeal being made, the Indian rate-payers were informed that they would not be required to pay rates any longer. But admission to the public school was persistently refused on racial grounds, and there is still no Government school for Indian children in Suva, though the majority of the inhabitants are Indians. This Municipal policy of Suva is unfortunately in keeping with other forms of discrimination against the Indian, which have reduced him to a mere cipher in Municipal affairs. Not only has the Indian been refused educational facilities for his children, but at the same time he has been practically disfranchised.

If Fiji is to come into line with the standard set by the other Colonies she ought to be spending at least £10,000 or £12,000 a year on education. At present the Government of Fiji is throwing almost the whole of its responsibility for education on the Missionary Societies.

It is indeed pathetic to see the attempt made by the Indians themselves to supply the educational need which ought to be supplied by Government. On the North side of the main Island and elsewhere there are many instances which show how keen is the desire of the free Indian settlers for education.

1. At Nadi, a small school was discovered which was being held in a stable, behind a small store, with about a dozen small boys learning English from a Hindu woman. This woman had learned Engish at a Mission School in the Madras Presidency before coming out to Fiji, under indenture, some 12 years ago.

2. Near Ba there is a small school with about 20 boys on the roll who are taught English by an aged Maulvi. At Ba itself, near one of the few mosques we saw in Fiji, two or three boys are daily taught from the Quran.

3. At the same centre, Ba, the Indians themselves (both Hindu and Musalman) subscribed and built a school-house a year ago. This unfortunately has been empty ever since, for want of a suitable teacher, although the Indians are willing to contribute liberally towards the support of a qualified man.

4. At another Indian settlement in the interior of the Island, on the banks of the Rewa River, a similar school-house has been built by voluntary contributions. But this too is almost useless for want of a suitable teacher.

5. We were told of an attempt to start a school in a country district in the South of the main island. After a short time, however, the funds gave out and the school was closed. The head teacher was then paid by the Mission and the school was re-opened by them.

6. An enthusiastic effort was made in Suva to found a school in which Hindus and Muhammadans should be taught together. A two-storied building was given for the purpose by a leading Musalman, on the understanding that the upper storey should be used for a mosque. We attended many discussions with regard to this school. The opinion we formed was, that though there were good intentions in abundance, yet there was very little practical leadership.

The Fiji Government is at last beginning to awake to its responsibility for educating the increasing Indian population; for it sees more clearly than before that an unenlightened people is a danger to the well-being of the Colony. But so far it has been unable to secure properly qualified men, on account of the low salaries offered. Certainly there could be no finer opportunity for young men of education and ideals who are anxious to serve their fellow-countrymen, than to go out in educational service to Fiji. For, there, they would have the chance of helping to shape a new country's development, which may eventually become an Indian Colony. Not only Government, but also the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, has begun to take up the matter with some feeble interest. The

Company has just offered £300 and a site to each of the missionary institutions in order to relieve itself of the responsibility of running schools of its own. The Vancouver Mill at Navua also gives a small contribution to the Mission school there.

But the subject of education needs to be taken up much more thoroughly and seriously if the need is adequately to be met. For the whole future of Fiji depends largely upon such a system of education being built up, amongst the Indian population, as will render it a useful and stable element in the life of the Colony.

When we were asked by the Fiji authorities what system and method of education would be best suited for Indian needs, we expressed very strongly the opinion, that it would be a mistake for Government to place everything in the hands of the missionaries, and merely give grants-in-aid to them. We had abundant opportunities of reaching the real opinion of the Indian community in Fiji, and we were certain that such a policy would be looked upon as a very serious infringement of the principle of religious neutrality. The Indians in Fiji are for the most part quite illiterate. It is not to be expected that they will be able to organise and collect funds for their own schools on the scale of the European missionaries. For a very long time to come, therefore, it would not be possible for them to meet the active missionary propaganda on equal terms of activity. If the Fiji Government were simply to stand aside and distribute grants-in-aid, the Missionary Societies would be certain to step in and reap all the financial benefits. This would give the whole Indian education of the Islands a predominantly Christian colour, even though the Indian parents might wish their children to be educated in their own Hindu and Musalman religious precepts.

At the same time, we found no wish, on the part of Indians, to exclude the missionaries from education altogether, or to ask for purely secular schools. They had a great and natural respect for the work that the missionaries had done. They recognised that the missionaries had been their friends and had made known their grievances at a time when they themselves were mute and helpless. The Mission schools, also, had struggled on without any help from Government, at a critical period when

European sentiment in the Colony was set against Indian education altogether. The Indian community in Fiji, however ignorant and illiterate, was generous and liberal in its appreciation of those who had helped in the hour of need. There were no two English names more frequently on their lips than those of Miss Dudley and Mr. Burton. They spoke of these two friends and helpers with an affection amounting to reverence. It was the work of missionaries like these, struggling against overwhelming odds, that had saved the whole Indian community from falling to the lowest level of ignorance and vice.

We can both of us recall vividly the scene we saw one afternoon in a Christian orphan home in Fiji, the only Indian orphanage in the Islands. The house was beautifully situated on a slightly rising ground near the banks of the broad Rewa River opposite some crowded coolie " lines ". We had just come from the indentured coolie quarters, and had seen the condition of the little children, living in the midst of sights and sounds which innocent children ought never to see and hear. Then, in this home across the river, we watched a group of tiny children at their play. One baby was pointed out to us, whose mother had been murdered in a quarrel in the "lines," and whose putative father had been hanged for the murder. There were other children in the home who had a somewhat similar history. We could not help contrasting the happiness and innocence of these little ones with the evil and impurity of their former surroundings, and we were only too thankful for this haven of pure childhood, which had been offered to them for shelter.

While, therefore, the Indian community gave all due respect to the missionaries for what they had done and were doing, they were convinced that it would be harmful to allow the whole Indian education of the Island to come into missionary hands. They wished rather to have Government schools side by side with missionary schools.

Our own decided opinion was in favour of this policy also. Apart from the question of religious neutrality, which missionary institutions, by their very character cannot observe, Mission schools, if left to themselves, have a tendency to become educationally inefficient. False economies are often made, and unqualified teachers, taken from the ranks of catechists, are put in charge. On the other hand, Government schools, if left to

themselves, have a tendency to become educationally extravagant. Useless expense is not seldom incurred according to the whim of some new Director, or Inspector. But when the two systems exist side by side—the Government and the Missionary—they are able to counteract one another. The weakness of the one system is the strength of the other. Liberty of conscience is also in a far greater measure preserved by such a combination.

If such a combined system were adopted in Fiji, two further things would be necessary. There should be the right of entry into every school for accredited ministers of religion. There should, also, be especially liberal grants allowed to any educational venture, Hindu, Musalman or Christian, that proceeded direct from the Indian community itself and was financed by Indian money.

We have been obliged to go somewhat further in offering advice on this subject of Indian Education than might possibly be regarded as fitting in a Report of this kind. Our reason for doing so has been, that we were specially asked by the Indian community to put forward their views, because they had such great difficulty in doing so themselves. There was no subject on which they were more unanimously anxious, and on which they laid greater emphasis. They were wont, in a very touching manner, to look forward with confidence and hope to the removal of all their moral evils, if only education could be given to their children on right lines. After what we heard, in the Pacific, of the beneficent results of liberal education in the Philippines, during recent years, we felt that there was much to be said for this point of view.

It seemed more and more clear to us, the longer we stayed in the Island, that there was no side of Indian life in Fiji, where the Government and the people of India might offer more practical help, at this juncture, than by pressing forward the urgency of a comprehensive educational policy with regard to Indians in Fiji—a policy large and wide enough to cover the whole of the Islands. We hoped also that it might be possible to offer any initial aid that might be required. We have reason to believe that a representative from India sent out to assist in such a greatly needed reform would be welcomed by the authorities in Fiji. He would also receive from every

section of the resident Indian community the warmest possible welcome and support.

Medical aid to the Indian community has not shared the same fate as that of Education. Owing to the express regulations, sanctioned by the Government of India and enforced throughout the Colony, the medical treatment of the Indian indentured population has been, on the whole, satisfactorily undertaken. The present Head of the Government Medical Department for the Islands, Dr. Lynch, has taken the utmost pains to carry out the Government regulations, not only in the letter, but in the spirit in which they were drawn up. The result has been a low death-rate among indentured Indians. One unsatisfactory feature remains—the very high death-rate among infants. But this will never be put right, so long as the mother is forced by the very Law of Indenture to neglect her own children.

We were impressed by the ability, not only of the Head of the Department, but also of the staff which he had under him; though it appeared to us to be too small for such a highly important work. The hospital arrangements were also satisfactory. We were not ourselves able, on account of the shortness of our visit, to see any of the outlying Islands, where medical aid must be much more difficult to provide adequately. But what we did see was good. We heard also from the Indians themselves about the truly noble work that was being done among the lepers on the Leper Island.

The real medical difficulties among Indians (which Dr. Lynch was himself the first to point out to us) are to be found mainly with the free population. These, both in India itself and in the coolies' "lines," have been used to receiving practically free medical assistance in times of sickness, and they cannot reconcile themselves to beginning, late in life, to provide and pay for their own medical treatment. They are very ignorant indeed, and not seldom very poor (though some are prosperous), and it is regarded by them as a very great hardship when they are compelled to pay heavy medical fees.

To give examples, when free Indians ask for admission into the hospitals, which are built for the indentured population, they have to pay two shillings a day, unless they can prove that they are destitute. To prove this, they have to obtain a special order from the Magistrate or Immigration Officer. The delay

and hindrances in getting this, during times of sickness, are often so great, that in order to obtain immediate medical aid, money is borrowed somehow, and the high fees of an English doctor are paid. Then, afterwards, the family of the Indian, who has been ill, is weighed down by a heavy burden of debt. We were told by one man that his wife's confinement had cost him over Rs. 150 in medical fees, and that he had been in debt ever since. Not seldom, in such cases, hopelessly unskilled treatment is called in and the poor woman suffers agonies and even death. It should be remembered that there is not a single qualified Indian doctor in the whole of Fiji. There is no possibility of treatment, also, by the Ayurvedic or Yunani systems.

An English Medical Officer told us the instance of a whole Indian family, which was ordered into the hospital, as a precaution against the spread of typhoid. Each member of the family had to pay two shillings a day, for as long a period as they were detained. The doctor, who told us this, regarded this charge as a great hardship and tried to get it removed.

In Suva there is an excellent hospital which admits free Indians without any such heavy charges. It was a great pleasure to us to visit this and to find how friendly the Fijians and Indians had become towards one another under its common roof. In earlier days, for the sake of peace and quietness, they had to be kept in different wards, but now they were quite happy, even when one ward overflowed into another and both races were mixed together.

We consulted with Dr. Lynch, at great length, concerning the possibility of introducing Indian doctors into the Islands, at suitable rates of pay, who might be able to come closely in touch with the whole Indian population. Dr. Lynch was himself entirely in favour of such an introduction. We also discussed with him the question of a complete State system of free medical and sanitary aid for all Indians alike, similar to that which we were suggesting to the Fiji Government with regard to education. In our own minds, one of the great additional advantages of two such schemes would be that these would provide the Indians in the Colony with a respected class of their own fellow-countrymen, whom they might look up to as their natural leaders.

If a considerable number of such qualified doctors were introduced from India, in addition to qualified teachers engaged in the education of the young, then in a perfectly natural manner the illiterate and depressed Indian population would obtain that very leadership which it now so sadly requires. As such men, by their very profession, would have a good standing in the Colony, they would give to the Indian community a weight and dignity which is wholly lacking at present. They would restore to the Indians themselves, not only health and knowledge, but also self-respect.

The emphasis which we have laid on the need of building up, entirely anew, from the very beginning, what we have called the "leadership" of the Indian community in Fiji, may appear strange to those who have not witnessed with their own eyes the present condition of Indians in the Islands. To us, as we saw things on the spot, this one question of "leadership" seemed to be more important, in dealing with the future, than any other. Assuming that the present fatal disproportion of the sexes will be altered and the indenture system abolished, there is one thing further that will be required, namely, the recovery of self-respect. The free Indian population has to be built up anew into a self-respecting community—a community in which such vices as now are rampant will be condemned in no uncertain way by public opinion. But such public opinion can only be formed by leaders; and at present no leaders exist.

If the conception of attempting to plan out a new leadership be regarded as artificial—and it is argued that leaders, like poets, are born and not made—then the answer may be given that educational and medical reforms are, for their own sake, sorely needed in Fiji. They are not artificial wants at all. Therefore, all that is asked for, or required, is that the men who are sent out to carry through these reforms should be worthy men, carefully and wisely chosen. The rest will follow of itself. Some, at least, among such men will have the gift of leadership, and, what is more important still, the whole of them together will fill a gap in what is now an entirely artificial and unnatural social structure, namely, an Indian community without any responsible leaders.

As in the matter of education, so in the case of medical aid, we have reason to believe that the Fijian Government would welcome most warmly a representative from India, who fully

understood the needs of the Indian people, and could help and advise Dr. Lynch himself in carrying out his far-reaching and progressive ideas.

We discussed with the medical authorities one further question of great importance. This was the restoration of the burning ghat for the last rites of the Hindus. We found to our great surprise that the sanitary religious custom of burning the dead, along with all its ceremonial, had been entirely abandoned by all Hindus—even by Brahmans. The insanitary custom of burying the dead, often in shallow ground only slightly below the surface, had been substituted for it. As far as we could see there was no religion, and scarcely any decency, in this function. Broad rivers and open seashores abound in Fiji on every side, and it would be quite easy to restore the ancient Hindu custom of cremation at the water's edge, if only the desire for it was still present among the people. But religion has ceased to be a daily reality among Hindus in Fiji. Things have worked themselves out in a vicious circle. The loss of outward observance has led to a decay of the inner religious spirit, while the decay of the inner religious spirit has now almost obliterated the desire for the restoration of ceremonial rite and worship. And, as we have pointed out, the abandonment of religion has led to an abandonment of morals. Whatever may help to bring back religion will help to bring morals also.

It is a relief to turn from this chequered picture of light and shade to describe what we expect for the future.

When the present indenture system has been abolished and the present recruiting system stopped, we have every hope that a rapid recovery of the morals of the Indian population will ensue. With the improvement in morals, other changes will follow in their turn.

We wish to state, in conclusion, the reasons which we have for this hope.

First, our whole experience in Fiji has taught us to place a great faith in the powers of nature and of mother earth to bring back a wholesome moral life to those Indians who settle on the land. Again and again, the evidence of this fact cheered us in Fiji, and it is one of the most striking pieces of evidence which we have brought back with us. For countless generations

in India, the villager has lived close to the soil, and he has gained certain moral qualities thereby. He has lost these, for the moment, by the unnatural life in the coolie "lines" of Fiji. But he has not lost them altogether. They are far too deep-seated for that. They may be very rapidly recovered. And when they are recovered, we could hardly imagine any country in the world which could give them more scope than Fiji.

It was wonderful to notice how nature, with all its beauty, appealed still to the Indian coolies, even in the midst of their squalid surroundings. They often used to speak to us about it. "Sahib," one woman said to us, "this place is more beautiful than India. But man is much worse here." This, indeed was a commonly expressed opinion. We heard it on all sides.

Among the Indians living in the towns, squalour still prevailed. Even on the outskirts of towns the aspect of free Indian settlements was not pleasing. But far away in the country, the whole character of life was quite different. Both in Fiji and in Natal, we found that a love of nature, and a delight in the soil, are ingrained in the Indian villager. The moment conditions are favourable, the flower of this love blossoms and healthier moral conditions follow.

The land of Fiji is still virgin soil, over vast areas. Only a fringe of the coast and of the river valleys has been touched by cultivation. The climate is very healthy indeed. It was a pleasure to see the chubby little Indian children in the free Indian settlements, so different from those we knew in malaria-stricken Bengal and in the up-country districts of India. The crops of rice and maize are good, where they have been sown, and there is no over-crowded population.

Not only is there a natural aptitude in the Indian settler to build up a healthy family life on the land, when the artificial hindrances are removed, but, in the matter of land settlement the Government is now fully awake to its own responsibilities. The Sugar Companies, also, have seen the great advantage to themselves of a free resident population occupying the soil in the neighbourhood of their cane crushing mills. Hitherto there have been great difficulties and hardships owing to the leases being held by the Fijian communal tribes. A lease could only be entered into with the whole tribe. But Government, while observing strictly the rights of the Fijians, is now at last acting

for them on a great scale in the matter of leases. Thus the Indian villager, in future, will be able to obtain his land direct from Government, a method of ownership which he has been used to in India itself. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company has placed fifteen lakhs at the disposal of Government for Indian settlement alone—the rate of interest charged being only four per cent. They would be prepared to offer still greater amounts of money to Government if this first venture turns out to be a success. The Company's capital, invested in the Islands, already amounts to five crores, so that they are able to do things on a large scale. They have now found out, by practical experience, the great value of the Indian settler as a cultivator of the soil, and are anxious to retain him. Therefore, from a strictly business point of view, it is certain that they will offer to him every inducement to become an independent farmer sending his sugar-cane to their mills.

Our second cause of hopefulness is the character of the administration in Fiji. There has been very much indeed in the past, which has been mistaken and even foolish. The continuance of the old marriage regulations for over thirty years is a case in point. There has been a strange negligence in getting expert advice from India, which has frequently led to disaster. The difficulty of the problem of Indian immigration was hardly realised, and things were allowed to go on in a haphazard way. All this, and more, might be said with regard to the past.

But we found to-day, in Fiji, a just and enlightened Government, sincerely anxious to do its duty by the Indians. We discovered, on our arrival, that they had already taken in hand, in a liberal and broad-minded spirit, some of the very reforms which our own experience in Natal had made us anticipate to be necessary in Fiji. The question of land settlement was one of these. The complete revision of the Marriage Law was another. The practical abolition of all penal clauses from the present Law of Indenture was a third. Many other questions of great interest to the Indian population had been carefully considered. There were two separate committees in session dealing with these matters while we were in the Islands.

We would wish, at this point, to express our sense of the very great benefit which has come to the Indian community in Fiji

owing to the visit of the Government of India's Commission to the Islands more than two years ago. It will be seen by those who have read the Commission Report that the conclusions arrived at by the two Commissioners did not go so far as our own. Nevertheless, there were facts mentioned about excessive prosecutions, frequent suicides, and sexual immorality, which were serious enough to make the thoughtful reader pause. And so far as the Commissioners had been able to reach the facts, they had attempted fairly to face them. They suggested also important improvements.

From the time of the Commission onwards, all these recent changes have taken place, and all these new schemes have been carried forward, especially those with regard to land settlement and marriage—the two subjects which appeared to us of vital importance for Indians in Fiji. There have been valiant attempts, also, to bolster up the indenture system itself, in order to make it look respectable. Fines are to take the place of imprisonment, commutation of indenture is to be allowed, schools are to be built, coolie "lines" are to be pulled down. The activity has been great since the Government of India's Commission came. Though we cannot but regard all these things as palliatives, while indenture is still in force, there will be much that can be utilised for further progress, when indenture is abolished.

Along with legislation, both immediate and prospective, we found that administration had gone forward also. We had a continually increasing experience, as soon as we were able to make a comparison with the past, that justice towards the Indian, both on the estates and in the courts of law, was much more impartially administered than it had been in days gone by. The old scandals of administration had almost disappeared.

The following examples may serve to illustrate some of the general statements which have been made in the preceding paragraphs.

1. We were much struck by the genuine kindly feelings towards those Indians who had taken up domestic service with Europeans. We found by chance an Indian lad in Suva Hospital suffering from consumption. He told us with touching affection how the "Mem Sahib" had sent him down extra diet of

cream every day and how the Sahib had been down to visit him. When we asked the Sahib's name, we found him to be a leading member of His Majesty's Government.

2. We were deeply interested, in the North of the Island, to see the earnest endeavour made by the manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to help forward in every way those capable and industrious Indians who wished to settle on the land. He had evidently bestowed great pains and forethought over this matter, and, as figures quoted elsewhere will show, he had met with considerable success.

3. We found an extremely well-conducted Indian Police Force in Suva. These Indians, who were Sikhs, were paid a good monthly wage and expressed themselves, on the whole, contented with their position. They had come out under an agreement, but there was nothing about it which was servile. Their passage out was quite different from that of ordinary coolies. One of them told us he had travelled second class. They were treated well by their superior officers, who spoke highly of their men.

But the most striking thing about them was that they did not take bribes. We found out from all classes of Indians, that there was practically no bribery among the Indian Police in Fiji. We asked very frequently the question: "Do the Police take bribes?" and the answer invariably was: "No, Sahib." We felt at once, that this was a very remarkable fact, and we determined to enquire into it thoroughly. The more we did so, the more clearly we discovered that it was chiefly a question of self-respect—that, and a decent living wage. With these Indian Police, self-respect had been preserved. They could live in a respectable manner, and they were treated with respect by their officers. With the Indian labourers under indenture almost every particle of self-respect seemed to have vanished.

One of the Sikh policemen put the same thing very tersely to us, from another point of view—"Sahib," he said, "these junglis (Fijians) respect us, but they do not respect our brothers (the indentured Indians)."

Some of these policemen had come from Shanghai and Hong-Kong. They told us that the Fiji Police Service was the best.

In corroboration of this estimate of the Fiji Indian Police, we met an indentured labourer from Fiji, soon after our return to India, whose first complaint to us in India was that the Police in his district took bribes and committed "zulm," but they had nothing like that in Fiji.

4. Considerable misunderstanding has arisen in India owing to one-sided reports about the municipal vote in Suva. The vote has certainly been taken away. When we were in the Capital, we condemned openly, in no measured terms, the injustice which the municipality has done in practically disfranchising the Indian citizens. But the fact remains that, up to last year, the franchise was so wide open to all races that the Indians had the predominant vote in the elections, though ninety-five per cent of them could not speak English, and a large proportion of the remainder could not read or write in any language at all, and had to give their thumb-marks in order to register their vote. There can be no question that the election of 1914 became a farce, owing to the illiterate Indian voters registering all their votes for one particular candidate, and returning him at the head of the poll in a most unintelligent manner. What we protested against, therefore, was not the exclusion of illiterate, but the exclusion of literate voters, whose language was Hindustani, not English. That appeared to us quite unfair, and we had many promises from leading European citizens that this wrong should be righted as speedily as possible. At the same time, in spite of what had happened last year, when we went into all the facts, what struck us most was the extremely liberal character of municipal franchise in Fiji before this action took place. We felt certain that a country which had been so very wide in its franchise once, would be liberal again, and that what had happened was only a temporary set-back, not a permanent disfranchisement. There are always tides of action and reaction in politics. The events of last year represented the furthest reaction.

We would mention in this connection that we had many talks with the Acting Governor and the Colonial Secretary concerning the appointment of an Indian representative to the Legislative Council, in the same way that a Fijian representative had been appointed. This would already have been done, had it not been for the servile condition of the Indians under indenture and the very little chance which they have of obtaining education

and thus qualifying themselves for such a responsible post. If there had been a body of Indians in the Islands from the first, of higher education and position, we feel certain that the Indian community would have been represented long ago. There was practically nothing of what might be called a "racial" attitude on the part of the Europeans in this matter. Those with whom we talked were very keenly in its favour.

[One of the greatest differences of all between what we found in South Africa and what we found in Fiji was this: In South Africa the Indian community had leaders. In Fiji they had none. This has been a serious drawback to Fiji.]

5. We came across very little marked racial prejudice in the Islands. The population is much too cosmopolitan to allow of such a thing. It is usually when only two different races are face to face with one another in large numbers that the strongest race prejudice arises. When there are many races, the prejudice is likely to be less. In Fiji, this "mingling of all races" is bound to increase very rapidly, as it has done in Honolulu and Samoa, and it is sure to bring with it the "cosmopolitan" rather than the "racial" spirit. Japanese, Chinese and Samoans are coming into Fiji in considerable numbers as traders and market gardeners. There appears very little chance indeed of any very large increase of the Australian population. We were told that Fiji would never become a "white man's country".

One of our surprises, in the course of our travels, was to find that the Australian himself had not got any very strong race prejudice. We had misunderstood him. His "White Australia" policy is almost entirely economic, and even that is breaking down. On board ship we were struck by the "hail-fellow-well-met" attitude of the Australians generally towards some Indian passengers. There is extraordinarily little class distinction in Australia. A man is valued at what he is worth—whether he is a duke, or a bricklayer.

There is little danger, therefore, that strong racial feeling will develop in Fiji from the Australian side, and if only the Indian were raised out of his present degradation, there would be no danger at all. It was interesting to see the way in which the young Australian police officers respected the Indian policemen. One of these told us that they themselves were quite ready to propose Indian commissions.

The New Zealander is, if anything, still more free from race prejudice than the Australian. Indeed, in all the world, we doubt if there is any country in which race prejudice has been conquered more completely than in New Zealand. The Maories there have every political privilege. They are accepted as volunteers. They send their children to the public schools. They intermarry without any injurious marriage bar.

We found some ordinary Indian labourers at Tamaranui who were getting ten shillings a day for unskilled labour—the full Trade Unions wage. They had votes, and like the Maories could send their own children to the public schools.

These facts with regard to our travels have been given, because the European population of Fiji comes almost entirely from New Zealand and Australia. There will probably never arise a situation equivalent to that in the Southern States of America, or in South Africa. The Indian will be judged by his character, not by anything else. It is all the more necessary, therefore, that those Indians who go out to Fiji, should go out under decent conditions for character building. And we could imagine no personal and monetary aid more valuable than that given in spreading education among the neglected Indian population in Fiji.

6. We were able to watch the administration of justice at more than one centre. We found that there was a great amount of ignorance of Indian habits and Indian vernaculars, but we found also a very true independence from outside influence among the Magistrates in giving their decisions. The Chief Justice of the Islands has evidently done his best to increase the efficiency of the courts and to punish mal-practices. Where we felt a real weakness existing was with regard to some barristers who made their money out of Indian lawsuits and the drawing up of quasi-legal agreements. Here, unquestionably, greater strictness would be wholly beneficial. The ignorant, illiterate coolie needs protection against practices which the lawyer's profession itself should be the first to discountenance.

To show the desire for justice—in the case of a coolie at Navua, who had complained of ill-treatment while we were there, the Immigration Department took up the case for the coolie and the Acting Governor sent down the Attorney-General to act on his behalf. As far as we were able to judge, every

step had been taken in order to ensure justice. The case ended in the coolie's complaint being found true and the offender being punished.

7. We were much struck by the perfect freedom allowed to us by a European gentleman (at whose house we were staying) to bring Indians—often from the ordinary coolie class—into his house in order to hear their long stories. He would come up himself and join with us in talk, as far as his knowledge of the vernacular allowed. It would have been impossible for Indian coolies to have been treated more courteously and freely; and the trouble caused to him by such a daily stream of visitors, from morning till night, was by no means inconsiderable. Yet he put up with it all with the utmost consideration. The Indians, who came, felt his kindness as much as ourselves.

8. We went very carefully into the case of a European overseer who had been found guilty of committing offences with the women in the coolie "lines". The man was dismissed, and an undertaking given to Government that he should never be allowed to be in charge of coolie "lines" again. We were told on high authority that this was always done, wherever a case was clearly proved, and that this offence has grown far less frequent in the Colony. We felt, however, that, with the state of morals among the Indian women which clearly existed (through no fault of their own, but because of the indenture system) it was altogether wrong to employ unmarried European overseers and unmarried Indian sardars. The temptation of such a position was too great. We placed before the Immigration Department and before the Acting Governor a strong expression of our opinion on the matter, and we believe that already steps have been taken so that only overseers living with their own wives, and sardars who are married men, shall in feature be set over the "lines".

9. One excellent law is in force throughout the whole Colony, which prevents any intoxicating liquor being sold to Indians, under any circumstance whatever, without a written doctor's order. There was considerable grumbling among some of the Indians in Suva concerning this law, because it did not apply to Europeans also. But, however that may be, there can be no question whatever that the law has had very beneficial effect.

It is not a law on paper. It is strictly enforced. While we were in the Islands, the case occurred of an English publican selling "sly grog" to an Indian, and he was fined seven hundred and fifty rupees, or six months' imprisonment. We never saw a single Indian who was intoxicated during the whole time we were in Fiji. This, again, is strikingly different from what we saw in South Africa. Gambling, however, is terribly prevalent in Fiji, and there seems little effort made to prevent it. The street called "The Street of all Nations" in Suva (where Chinese, Japanese, Samoans, Fijians, Indians and half-castes live all mixed up together) is notorious for its gambling and vice. But there were very few signs of drink.

These are examples which might be multiplied a hundred times over from our own experience. They gave us a strong general impression that, whatever might have been the case in the past, the Fiji Government was now wide awake to its responsibilities, and would only be too anxious to do anything that was possible to remedy the moral evils which prevailed among the Indian population. And what was equally important, there appeared to be no strongly marked racial prejudice, which would stand in the way of ultimate Indian citizenship. We are confident that the Indians of the Colony will win, in good time, their full civic rights, just as the Fijians are now well on the way to win theirs. What is most needed is a body of responsible and educated Indians, of good position in the Islands, who will be able to represent their community when fuller rights of citizenship are given.

A third consideration, which makes for greater hopefulness, is the changed outlook towards India which has been spreading in recent years over the whole of the South Pacific, and has given rise to kindlier feelings and more intelligent views.

This change began more than three years ago, when *Gitanjali* was first published. We were often told in Australia how unique was the appeal which that one small volume made to thoughtful Australian men and women. It went direct to the heart, and won its way by its own inner beauty. Amid the rush and noise of modern life, in a vast and undeveloped country, it brought a message of peace. Wherever we went, we came in contact with those who were looking

out upon the world with different eyes, and upon India with newer, kindlier sentiments, since they had read *Gitanjali.* Its influence has been like a seed growing secretly. For a time it may pass almost unnoticed. But when the seed is full grown, it will bring forth much fruit.

The war had carried forward this change of outlook towards India in quite a different direction. It had touched the imagination of the masses, and had given them a new conception of the bravery of the Indian soldiers. The old attitude of the common people, which prevailed before the war, was one of blank ignorance of India, not unmixed with contempt. The new attitude is one of almost unmixed admiration.

Gallipoli had touched the masses. There could be no doubt about that. Stories of the bravery of the Gurkhas were on everybody's lips. The shops had silver kukris, made up into brooches, and Australian girls were wearing them. The man in the street had "discovered" India. He had found out that India was not a land of downtrodden coolies, but a land of bravery and romance. What was more—India was suddenly found to be the next-door neighbour to Australia itself.

It is quite possible that much of this new attitude of the masses will be a war sensation only, which may die down again when the war is over. But two things appeared to us to be tending towards closeness of a more permanent kind. First, the educated classes in Australia have now been deeply moved towards India in intellect and thought, and this movement is not likely to die down. Secondly, the geographical closeness of Australia to India has been more clearly understood by all. The modern appliances of steam and electricity are making this nearness a patent and obvious fact. When the trans-continental railway is completed, in a year's time, Melbourne and Sydney will only be twelve days distant from Colombo. As the barriers of land and sea are thus broken down, the barriers of ignorance and prejudice will be overpassed also.

Indeed, so far had things gone from the Australian side, that, when we were travelling through the country, listening to opinions openly expressed on all sides, we seemed to find in the air a new sentiment towards India in the very making. At

public meetings in Melbourne and Sydney, when we openly and plainly condemned the "White Australia Policy," we were heartily cheered. People rose up in their places and declared before the whole audience that educated Australians, one and all, were opposed to the disrespect shown to educated Indians in their statutes, and that the country would soon be with them in demanding a revision of their ordinance.

With regard to the abolition of the indenture system of Indian labour in Fiji there was a strong desire for this everywhere expressed. Practically all whom we met, in Australia and New Zealand, wished that indenture should be abolished without any further delay. Their great wonder was that India had not taken up the matter long before.

"Some years ago," they said, "we were in the same position with regard to our Kanaka labour in North Queensland. The revelations made by the Royal Commission on that indentured labour shocked the whole of Australia. We found that "blackbirding" (*i.e.*, kidnapping) had become a traffic, and that immorality and suicide were rife. We had no peace till we had abolished the whole evil."

The figures which we mentioned about Indian suicide in Fiji did not come as a surprise to them. They had had even worse facts than these in North Queensland.

We felt that this new and friendly attitude of Australia towards India was of great importance to the Indians in Fiji. Australian influence is already strong in the Colony, because most of the European settlers come from Australia. Indeed, it is not at all unlikely that the Islands may pass under the direct administration of Australia and New Zealand at the end of the war. This was openly talked of in Australia as one of the probable "war changes". However that may be, the growth of respect for India in the South Pacific is bound to leave its mark upon the Indians settled in the Islands. A more kindly feeling and a greater willingness to help them is certain to ensue. It rests with India, the motherland of these her distant children, to give them such good conditions that they may worthily represent her in the Pacific.

A fourth consideration, which gives hope, is the present attitude of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. As the

...of their capital invested in the Islands is over five ... of rupees, their relation to Indian settlers cannot fail to ... great importance.

... of the most difficult parts of our enquiry was to get at ... of this Company—if a money-making business can ... said to possess a soul. The composite personality of the ... seemed to be something like the character of Dr. ... and Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel.

On the one side, the Company appeared to be a hard ... concern, exacting the last farthing of profit, grinding ... the faces of the poor with less than a living wage, refusing ... low compensation for labourers who had been maimed for life in the performance of their duty, while the shareholders were reaping profits which were so large that they had to be carefully concealed. So much for the harsher side. Then, on the other hand, we found the same Company in the character of a benevolent philanthropist, offering huge sums of money for Indian settlement on the land, preparing schemes for colonisation and carrying them out in practice, appearing before the Indian Government authorities with pamphlets to prove that the coolie on the estates was cared for like a favoured child of fortune—and actually believing its own statements.

Just as in the novel, so with the Company, the extraordinary thing was this, that not one, but both characters were true. When, therefore, we write of the present attitude of the Company as hopeful, we mean that the benevolent gentleman in the concern is, apparently, overcoming for the time being the harsher element. Certainly in the past two years, since the Government of India's Commission, this philanthropic side has been more than usually in evidence. One thing is certain. The help that the Napoleonic finance and business capacity of the Company may give to the solution of the Indian problem in Fiji, may be very great indeed.

The last and greatest cause of hope lies in the changed attitude of educated Indians themselves towards the whole question of Indian emigration. The people of India will clearly never allow such things to happen again, as have been allowed to pass unnoticed before. If to-day a regulation were proposed by the Government of India, that forty women should emigrate with every hundred men, it would be at once put out of court as

unthinkable. This simple fact, by itself, may serve to mark the change which has taken place.

In the future, every act of the Colonies, which employ Indian labour, will be scrutinised with eyes that nothing will escape. We are certain that the public conscience will never rest content till it has swept away the last of the abuses which have flourished like rank weeds wherever indentured labour has gone. We have now witnessed with our own eyes, in two different parts of the world, what this awakened public conscience can accomplish. We base on this, therefore, more than on any other single cause, our strongest hopes for the future.

We would not wish to end this Report without paying one more tribute of respect to the Indian coolies themselves, whom we have now seen working under indenture, both in South Africa and in Fiji.

Owing to the conditions under which they have been obliged to live, we found them, men and women alike, in a degraded state. We have had to speak quite plainly and openly about that degradation. But we came away with a feeling, not so much of pity, as of respect. Their patience and fortitude and simplicity won our continual regard. Through all the evil and misery of their fate, they had kept the soul of goodness. Every now and then, some beautiful action would come to light, which showed that the sweetness of human relations had not been lost, and that the pure ideal of womanhood still held its ground. The one action which seemed to us most typical of this has already been mentioned. Yet it will bear repeating, because it sums up the whole picture which we would wish to leave impressed on the mind.

It was the scene of that group of Indian coolies, who had come many miles to see us, and brought with them the widow and her little daughter whom they reverenced and loved. With an extravagance that was out of all proportion to their wealth, they were willing to pay any sum of money asked for, if only the wish of the widow might be granted, and she might not be compelled to leave the piece of ground where her husband had lived and died.

We left Shantiniketan, Bolpur, on September 15, 1915, in order to go out to Fiji. The memory and inspiration of the

Ashram, and of those who dwelt there, was with us through all our long journey. The freedom of its life made us the more sensitive to the misery which we witnessed in the coolie "lines". We remembered also constantly the villagers of India whom we had left behind. These memories gave colour to thoughts, and their influence will be felt in all that we have written. Now, when we return to India, after the voyage is ended, and see its fields and its villages once more, the longing rises that the day may not be far distant when the Indian homesteads in the beautiful islands of the Pacific shall be a true image of the best village life of India itself.

It is impossible for us to return thanks by name to all the many friends, both Indian and European, who have helped us with their counsel and given us their hospitality. We met with a courtesy throughout our visit to Fiji that was practically unbroken. We were treated by the Government authorities and by the planters with a generous freedom which left nothing to be desired.

We felt this trust all the more deeply, because we came without any credentials or letters of introduction. We had some difficulties at the Sydney headquarters of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in making our position understood, but we received from them a permission to go over their mills in Fiji, which was of great service to us. Their managers, both in the North and South of the main Island, offered us every help that was in their power.

Most of all, we feel gratitude towards the Indian labourers on the estates, both men and women, who gave us their complete confidence and answered our questions without fear. To them also, we came without credentials and without introduction. We were members of another race, speaking their mother language very imperfectly. They could not be certain whether they would not get into trouble, even for speaking to us at all. At times, the dread of this must have been very heavy upon them. Nevertheless, they accepted us, at once, without any reserve, as their friends. They told us fearlessly everything which was in their mind.

We trust that we have not betrayed in any way the confidence of these coolies by anything which we have written about them. We would add, to avoid misunderstanding, that

in every case in this Report where a coolie's name has been specially mentioned, the name of the actual coolie has been changed and a different name given.

Great political and commercial interests are bound up with the question of Indian labour in Fiji. Many secondary reasons may be brought forward to postpone the immediate abolition of indenture. Yet we would urge, with all the strength that is in our power, that the pathetic appeal which the Indian coolies made to us so unceasingly for help in their distress, should be lifted above the level of these lower interests, and made to depend upon the higher sovereign claims of humanity itself.

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